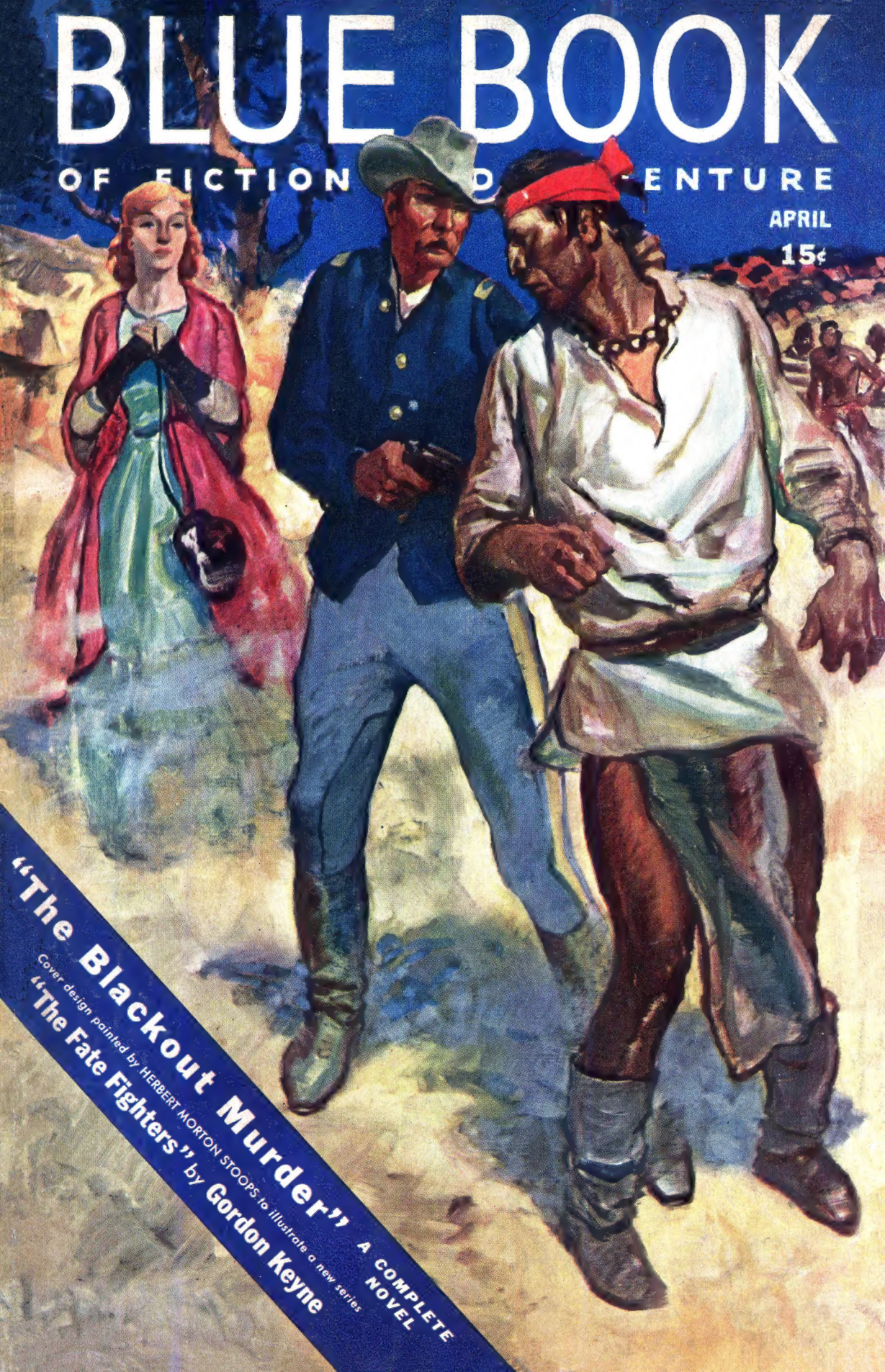


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BLUE BOOK



APRIL, 1939

MAGAZINE

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How I Found Adventure

*A celebrated writer tells of pioneer days in the South Seas
before the tourists came.*

By **BEATRICE GRIMSHAW**

I AM a Victorian.

I was born in the 'Seventies, in a big lonely country house five miles—a whole hour's journey—from Belfast.

I was governessed and schooled and colleged. I was taught to ride and to play games. I was taught to behave. To write notes for Mamma. To do the flowers. To be polite but not too polite, to Young Gentlemen. To accept flowers, sweets and books from them, but no more. To rise swiftly with the rest of the six daughters and sons when Papa came into the breakfast-room, to kiss him ceremoniously, and rush to wait upon him. He liked it, and we liked it.

I went to dances, and waltzed to "The Blue Danube," "Sweethearts," and "Estudiantina." I went to afternoon parties. I was chaperoned. My three sisters were good girls, and content.

But I was a Revolting Daughter—as they called them then. I bought a bicycle, with difficulty. I rode it unchaperoned, miles and miles beyond the limits possible to the soberly trotting horses. The world opened before me. And as soon as my twenty-first birthday dawned, I went away from home, to see what the world might have to give to daughters who revolted. What it gave me first was the offer of a journalistic post.

There were maps of far-away places, maps with tantalizing blanks in them; maps of the huge Pacific, colored an entrancing blue. I swore that I would go there.

I made a London newspaper commission me; I went. Long ago, when travel was travel, and the South Seas unknown to tourists; when

the charm of the island world was still unbroken. I went to all the chief island groups, and lived in most; I saw the inner New Hebrides, Solomons and New Guinea, at their rawest and fiercest; I roamed all over the East beyond the East, before anyone had begun to think of Java, or the Bali kings had prophetically committed suicide on their coral shores.

I had so many adventures that they ceased to seem adventurous. In the New Hebrides, I was caught in a forest fire, and barely escaped into a valley where bones of a recent cannibal feast lay blackening in the smoke. I stood on the shores of Tanna, and watched a recruiting schooner creep cautiously in, afraid to land her boats, while the men of the mountains, fighters and cannibals all, waited with loaded guns beside me, ready to attack the black-birding crew who had taken away their best. I was present at a dance of murderers and man-eaters, up in the Tanna hills, where no man went. There and elsewhere, I managed to make friends with the wild men of the woods.

In the Solomons, of recent years, I came in contact with the amazing native magic of the sorcerer, and lived in a house that was haunted by ghostly birds.

I saw—still in the Solomons—men who declared they had solved the secret of a happy life; they said they knew how to project themselves into another man's personality, provided he were agreed, and that such mutual changes often took place—wives, houses, names, habits, even faces, being transferred from one to another. They said they did this through their magic. *(Please turn to page 143)*



What Strange Powers Did The Ancients Possess?



EVERY important discovery relating to mind power, sound thinking and cause and effect, as applied to self-advancement, was known centuries ago, before the masses could read and write.

Much has been written about the wise men of old. A popular fallacy has it that their secrets of personal power and successful living were lost to the world. Knowledge of nature's laws, accumulated through the ages, is never lost. At times the great truths possessed by the sages were hidden from unscrupulous men in high places, but never destroyed.

Why Were Their Secrets Closely Guarded?

Only recently, as time is measured; not more than twenty generations ago, less than 1/100th of 1% of the earth's people were thought capable of receiving basic knowledge about the laws of life, for it is an elementary truism that knowledge is power and that power cannot be entrusted to the ignorant and the unworthy. Wisdom is not readily attainable by the general public; nor recognized when right within reach. The average person absorbs a multitude of details about things, but goes through life without ever knowing where and how to acquire mastery of the fundamentals of the inner mind—that mysterious silent something which “whispers” to you from within.

Fundamental Laws of Nature

Your habits, accomplishments and weaknesses are the effects of causes. Your thoughts and actions are governed by fundamental laws. Example: The law of compensation is as funda-

mental as the laws of breathing, eating and sleeping. All fixed laws of nature are as fascinating to study as they are vital to understand for success in life.

You can learn to find and follow every basic law of life. You can begin at any time to discover a whole new world of interesting truths. You can start at once to awaken your inner powers of self-understanding and self-advancement. You can learn from one of the world's oldest institutions, first known in America in 1694. Enjoying the high regard of hundreds of leaders, thinkers and teachers, the order is known as the Rosicrucian Brotherhood. Its complete name is the “Ancient and Mystical Order Rosae Crucis,” abbreviated by the initials “AMORC.” The teachings of the Order are not sold, for it is not a commercial organization, nor is it a religious sect. It is a non-profit fraternity, a brotherhood in the true sense.

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A Man *C*an Do

The first of a brilliant new series, based on the exploits of the Regular Army, by the able author of "Strange Escapes."

FORT BOWIE, with its three companies, basked in the afternoon sun upon its sentinel hill. Laughter and hearty voices drifted from the chinked log cavalry barracks, where the C troopers lounged, shirts open. Occasional voices sounded along the *ramada*, or brush-covered porch, fringing Officers' Row. The southern Arizona stage road, winding yellow-white through Apache Pass, was empty.

Robert McAllister, first lieutenant of cavalry and commanding Troop C, was in his single-room quarters, filling out his monthly return for the post adjutant. Transferred from Leavenworth eight weeks back, to fill the place of hospitalized Captain Kerr, McAllister liked the new position. He had under him a cub

second, young Rodney, and an efficient first sergeant; the Apaches were on their reservation to the south, and quiet; there was some hunting about the fort, and life promised well.

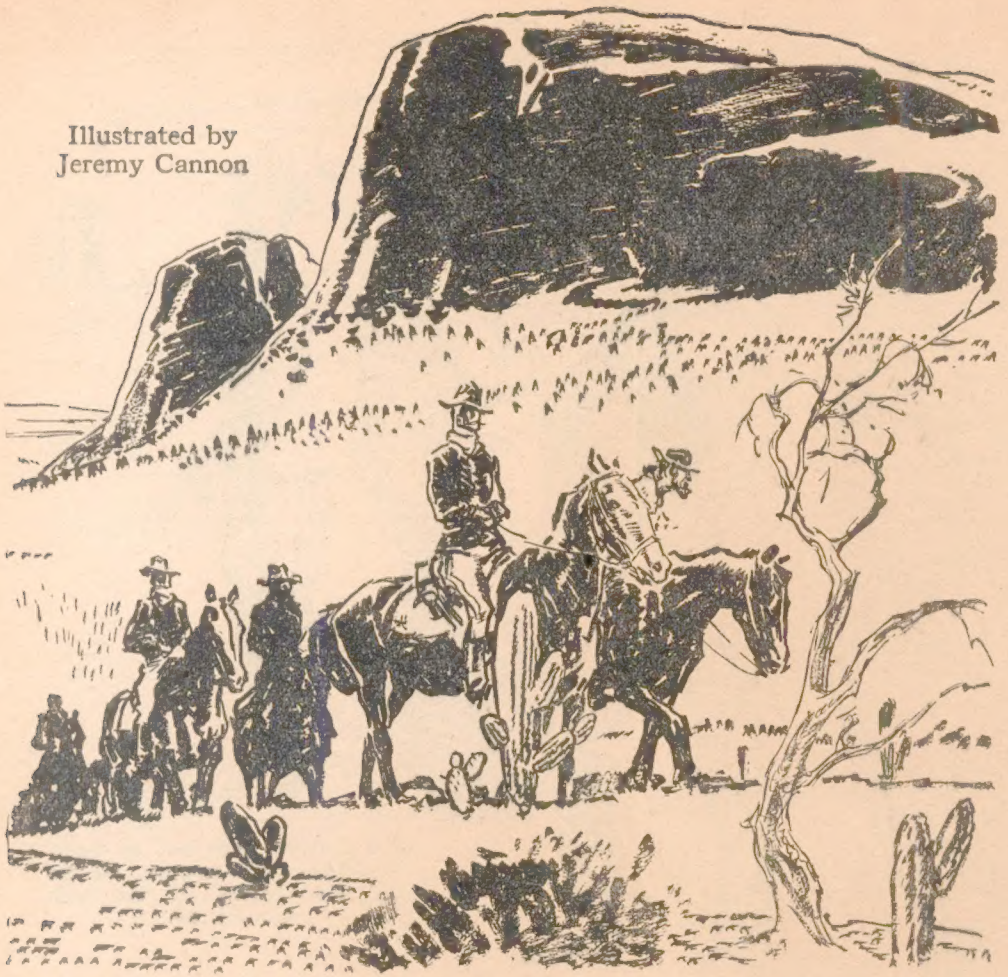
So spake reason; but in his heart of hearts, McAllister held lurking dread.

He was inspecting the return, when rapid hoofbeats came to his ears. Dispatches, like as not; a routine messenger. His pen spluttered the signature. Footsteps imperative and swift halted in the doorway. The headquarters orderly, red-faced with haste, stood at salute.

"The commanding officer's compliments, sir, and he wishes to see Lieutenant McAllister."

Something up! McAllister felt it, sensed the change, even as he paced into

Illustrated by
Jeremy Cannon



What He Must

By GORDON KEYNE

the sunshine for the headquarters adobe, cornering the parade. Talk had stilled; idle forms were tensely poised; eyes followed him curiously or followed a lathered horse being led to stables. Those hoofbeats had drummed the alarm of urgent news.

The seasoned adjutant, speculative eyes scanning him, nodded from his office doorway. "Hell to pay, Mac!" he said.

Fine old Major Nivens sat half-wheeled about at his battered desk to view the threshold. He still suffered from the wound received at Gettysburg ten years past; but by the droop of his heavy shoulders, the hands clutching the chair-arms, the wintry grayness framed by his bleached side-whiskers, something deeper hurt him now.

"Yes, Mr. McAllister! A civilian from down the road has just ridden in. The stage for Tucson was jumped by Apaches early this morning at the old Red Rock station, about halfway to Dragoon Pass. The driver and guard, a civilian passenger and three of the escort were killed. The three others were unhorsed and driven in among the rocks, two of them wounded. I'll send the ambulance. The devils made off with Connie."

"Sir!" McAllister stiffened. Connie was the Major's daughter—a bonny girl, here from school in the East.

"You know," continued the Major dully, "she took stage last night for Tucson, to visit a school friend at Camp Lowell. H Troop is not back from a practice march. You'll take one platoon



The Apache gave not an inch; McAllister side-stepped, as he had done before. It had been noticed, too.

of C, on the best of the mounts. Regardless of the ambulance, set out the soonest possible and overhaul those devils; don't bring on an engagement, but force them to deliver."

"I, sir?" The words came as involuntary protest, before McAllister could check them. Luckily, Major Nivens misconstrued their import.

"Oh, I know you're new at this work, but you're a man; you'll do. Can't send young Rodney. I'll give you Tony, the Mexican who speaks Apache; and Hutton, the scout who brought dispatches from Fort Grant yesterday. How many men will your platoon muster?"

"Twenty, sir. C Troop is down to forty active."

"These Apaches are off the Chiricahua reservation. The corporal of the escort sent word he counted thirty, armed with bows and repeating rifles. They're afoot; Connie is mounted on one of the stage horses, which was limping from an arrow

in its shoulder. So they'll probably travel slowly; the trail should lead for Sulphur Spring Valley, where old Cochise maintains his stronghold. You'll pick up the trail at Red Rock and follow it. You'll not likely be able to surprise them, but you may bring them to a talk. At first sign of an attack, they'd kill Connie and take to cover."

McAllister steadied his voice. "I'll consider her safety first, Major."

"Not entirely, McAllister, not entirely. If you fail with these fellows, lead your platoon into the reservation and see Cochise. Let him know word has been sent to other posts. He's to turn Connie over to you at once, and surrender those renegades to General Crook for punishment." The Major rose; he extended his hand, and the hand was cold.

"You'll of course have to use discretion. But for God's sake, McAllister, don't let Connie pass a night subject to the squaws and bucks on the reservation, if you can help it! I'd prefer the knife or the arrow."

As McAllister wheeled about, he knew that he was white through his tan. . . .

The news was ahead of him. The eyes of the men were all for him now. He

noted the expectant looks, and the trio of officers in grave confab—young Rodney, Blair, captain of infantry, and the post quartermaster and commissary. And he noted, suddenly, the figure square in his path, the figure blanketed to the chin, gray turkey-feather in the dark coarse hair.

With an inward catch of breath, an actual crawling of the spine, McAllister side-stepped and involuntarily passed around. The Apache gave not an inch; broad repellent visage, blackly glittering eyes that drove into McAllister like a knife-stab. Even now, of all moments, he side-stepped, as he had done once or twice before ere now. It had been noticed, too. Only last night at mess, honest Hutton, the scout, had chaffed him about it.

AS he strode on, McAllister cursed the fatalism that chilled his Scotch blood, that made an Indian more abhorrent to him than a rattlesnake, that froze him into cold paralysis under the glittering reptilian eyes of a redskin. Once again he fought the sharp dread in the orders transferring him from detached service in Leavenworth down here to the Indian country; but, he had comforted himself, the Chiricahuas were at peace.

"Mac! Are we going, sir?" came the eager boyish voice of young Rodney.

"I'm going with the first platoon. . . . Oversee the outfit, will you, while I'm throwing things together?"

He spoke mechanically and came to pause in front of his quarters, beckoning to Muldoon, the first sergeant, who was peering from barracks. Muldoon came at a run.

"Yes, sirr! We go, sirr?"

"The first platoon only. Turn the men out, see that the mounts are all fit; full belts, saddle-rations and fodder for three days. No sabers."

"Sure, we'll be saddled up in no time, sirr!"

In his quarters, McAllister was buckling on equipment when Six-toed Hutton sauntered in. A black-bearded man; battered felt hat, flannel shirt, jeans, cowhide boots—six toes to a foot, and famous because of it.

"So that's it," drawled the scout quietly. "I seen you side-step that buck."

"I did," snapped McAllister.

"He's a tame one; wouldn't hurt you, here. But he makes me bristle, jest the same. Like I've told you, 'Paches gimme the shakes. I'm allus scared of 'em, but

I got my scalp yet. Well, you're goin' Can't dodge it."

"Might as well be now as later," McAllister said bitterly. Here was one man to whom he could talk freely. "Anc as I once told you, it's something I can't help. My father, a captain, was killed by Apaches just before I was born; my mother saw the body."

Six-toes cradled his Government carbine in the crook of his arm.

"It's the eyes," he said shrewdly. "Injun eyes aint human; they're like lizard eyes, or like the eyes in a sidewinder when he's curled up, waiting."

"Well, what about these killers? Is Cochise back of them?"

"Hell! He's got no love for Bowie. It was here in Apache Pass the soldiers hung his brother and a passel of other bucks, after he'd escaped."

"Will these bucks listen to a talk?"

Hutton narrowed his gaze. "You're the soldier, Cap'n; it's your bluff. They'll guess you dasn't fire into 'em, account of losing the gal. Understand you're to hold 'em to a talk. Can you promise anything?"

"Not a thing. I want them to hand over Miss Nivens."

The scout grunted. "Well, you got to save her. Them 'Pache *jacals* aint a bed of roses for a white woman. All comes down to one thing: a man can do what he must. You git clear of this feelin' that come 'fore you was born, or it'll git you, sure. Bust it or it'll bust you. I reckon you'll do it, all right."

McAllister stepped outside. Bust it, eh? He had tried half his life to bust it, to no avail. Now he rode to crisis; and knew that once he came within arm-reach of any Indian, the old pre-natal dread would turn his heart to water.

THE Lieutenant would report the platoon is formed, sir!"

That was the orderly trumpeter, bringing him his mount. McAllister climbed into the saddle, thrust his officer's carbine into the boot, and wheeled about. Comradely hails broke out from the other officers. The men stood at their horses' heads, in platoon front; he heard his own voice, dry and emotionless:

"Prepare to mount! Mount!"

They were off and away. Ahead rose a blur of yellow dust, left by the grinding wheels of the ambulance, the hoofs of the mules and escort. On down to the stage road, and the stone and 'dobe station below the post.



All in one shuddering moment the burst of yells, the blast of gunfire

In column of twos the troop clattered past the station and the ambulance. The station-keeper, pipe in whiskers, tossed a hail and farewell. "Good luck, boys!" called the assistant surgeon on the driver's seat. "Tell 'em we're coming!"

The tawny road flowed in snaky curves among the flanking hills; the slopes covered with stiff brush and spotty piñons now opened, now closed again. The Major, back at the post, would have glasses trained on them for a last glimpse.

BRIMS were pulled low against the western sun; horses coughed; leather squeaked; metal jingled; dust lifted behind them and hung far to rear in the still air. McAllister rode in the lead, with Six-toed Hutton at his stirrup; behind came the trumpeter with Tony Besias, the Apache-raised interpreter.

Now they were out of the pass and jingling on, flanked to the south by those limitless rolling reaches.

"If you put up a solid front," said Hutton, setting his teeth to a ration of

plug, "and talk hot and heavy, like you was Gen'ral Crook with both bar'ls of his shotgun loaded for Injun, I sort o' reckon you might get the gal. 'Paches are precious of their hide. Trouble is, with a lot of 'em around, each one thinks his own hide's safe."

"Besias thinks we may catch them. He knows of an Apache watering-place where they may make rest-camp."

"I doubt it," said Hutton frankly. "Them devils can go further with a pebble to suck than a white man can with a full canteen. If you'll take a word of advice, sir, save the hosses if you want to save the gal."

McAllister nodded. He was taking advice, and glad of it.

Trot, walk, trot, walk, at cavalry routine, with a spume of dust always trailing behind, while the sun sank lower. A brief halt to tighten cinches. On again, and in the long shadows they headed in for the abandoned stage way-station, and saw the wreckage of attack in the road just ahead. The waylaid corporal of



and thud of arrows, the swirl of horses rearing, plunging, kicking.

escort came trudging out from the station.

"Thank God, sir! You're maybe in time. They took her south."

"Where are the other men, Mathews?"

"In here, sir. The stage-horses bolted at the first yell, and were riddled, all but one."

The excited words droned on. McAllister heard and saw, all in one shuddering moment. The burst of keen yells, the blast of gunfire and thud of arrows, the swirl of horses rearing, plunging, kicking. Troopers firing wildly, and brought to earth. The stage dragged on by its frenzied team, till the horses went down. All others killed, the girl hauled forth by bloody hands, surrounded by jeering savage faces, thrust ahorse, taken on with the plunder.

And he, God help him, with no heart for his soldier father's fate, assigned this hopeless hand-to-hand job! He heard his voice, precise and mechanical:

"Muldoon, loosen girths for ten minutes, let the horses stand at ease; see

that they're given a sop to wash the dust from their throats and nostrils."

Then he was riding on with Hutton, Besias and the trumpeter, past the station to the farther wreckage. The smoldering coach; driver, guard, passenger, all stripped and bloody; stiffly sprawled horses, gashed and abristle with shafts; slit mail-sacks; then upturned gravel and broken brush scarring the slope to the south.

"Plenty tracks," said Besias. Hutton was off and scanning the ground. "Moccasins, one hoss. Moon will be up directly."

The pink was narrowing in the western sky. The southern hills lowered into the dusk; a mellow shine touched the eastern horizon, heralding the moon.

AT the station, while the horses were being cared for, McAllister paced up and down alone, thinking, thinking, lips tight in his hard face. Hutton scanned him reflectively. A tall, hard man, soldierly, decisive, master of his



"You git clear of this feelin', or it'll git you, sure. Bust it or it'll bust you."

business; all hard and bronzed—and yet side-stepping that Injun buck. Queer, mused Six-toed Hutton, about these men with a flaw somewhere hidden. Either the flaw widened and spread into total ruin, or else it was mastered.

McAllister, passing the squinted eyes in the bearded face, knew what Hutton was thinking, and his jaw set. He himself had in mind that woman, fearfully alone in those hills of savage doom. He thought of what would happen when he found her; his dread was not for her, not for himself, but for the crisis and what it would evoke.

Off again! The air chilled, the moon rolled up. The trail was plain enough, and the freshened horses moved alertly. Hutton and Besias moved off together on a scout in advance, and the moon was high overhead when they returned.

"No catch 'um there, Lieutenant," announced Hutton. "Found their camp; they've vamoosed. Ate the stage-hoss, raw! Pony tracks, a couple or so; sign

that a small passel o' bronc's joined in. Tracks toler'bly fresh."

The Apache rest-place was as Hutton reported. An open spot on a bench of the valley, dropping ere the next billowy rise. A few piñons, trampled brush and soil; the savagely butchered stage-horse, like a warning.

The spare, swart Besias, who had been roaming anew, padded in on moccasined soles.

"Dees trail go on t'rough the valley," he reported. "Make for Sulphur, where Cochise has his beeg *rancheria*. Valley, she soon make beeg curve; I know dees country when I was 'Pache. No catch 'um now. I t'ink we run into one hell."

McAllister looked at him, looked at the deliberate, sardonic Hutton.

"Well," said the scout, drawing, "do you buck a pat hand?"

CHALLENGE, here! The report of Besias was ominous; it meant that there was no chance of catching the party. McAllister could now do as he chose; he had been allowed discretion. He sensed something tentative about the air of Six-toed Hutton.

The troopers, eased from the saddle while the horses cropped at the scant dry grass and rested from leg to leg, were listening. McAllister felt their doubt, weighing him in the balance, appraising him; they, like Hutton, awaited decision. He was new to these men. There had been gossip. Strange, about an officer side-stepping the glittering eyes of an Indian buck! Talk in an army post quickly filters through the rank and file.

McAllister swept Hutton, swept the men, with grimly scornful eyes. The fools, to think he was afraid! It was the future of which he stood in dread, of what that future would evoke from him.

He spoke crisply. "Jenkins! Take my horse, Corporal; he's a good one. Get back to the post as soon as you can, but ride savingly. Major Nevins is to be informed I've gone into the reservation to find Cochise; and I may stay there. He'll understand. Besias, they'll be taking Miss Nevins there?"

"I t'ink so," replied the Apache-raised Mexican.

"Form the men, Sergeant."

To passed orders, the troopers tightened girths again, mounted, and fell into column.

"All ready, Sergeant?"

"Yes sir."

"March!"

They were off. And McAllister, catching a grim and ghostly smile on the bearded lips of Six-toed Hutton, sensing the lift in the men's chatting voices, muttered an oath. The fools! How little they understood what real fear was, the fear inside a man's heart!

A little later Hutton was beside him, and spoke, grunting softly.

"Told you so! When you hate a thing, maybe you hate it, yeah. Then's the time you got to right-face and like it! I know. I've sweated my own self."

Right-face! Right-face and like it! Something to that advice, thought McAllister; but he only scowled and snapped an unbending word. The scout chuckled again and rode on in the van, a figure merging with the dim moonlit spaces.

Right-face! The words took military command in McAllister's brain, as he rode. . . .

The night hours wore away, at steady pace, as they headed into the reservation; and ever the dread of what lay waiting grew keener in Robert McAllister's soul. Talk big, talk like Crook with an army behind him—"Cluke," the Apaches called him—throw your bluff heavy! But he was not the right sort for that, he felt. "Apaches are precious of their hides," Hutton had said; there was a world of truth in it. If he could get Cochise alone and ram a gun into his brisket—ah, that was the thing!

The rolling valley bore on in wide sweeps, each succeeding vista blank. The moon was past; the night was past; McAllister felt the dawn chill nip his stiff cheeks and damply seep through blouse and gauntlet. The morning star flashed alone in the brightening east.

Dawn grew; rosy spears ascended the sky. McAllister plodded along on the corporal's jaded mount, the column soberly following. The sun rose, flaming in level beams across the hills.

The jogging column at long last kicked up the dust of a wide trail laid by lesser trails entering it from the side draws. Indians, popping into sight, stared for a moment and then plied whip and heels to speed the alarm.

IT was mid-morning when another of the low passes opened upon the place they sought, the *rancheria* or village of the chief. It sprawled in a bottomland of sparse brush, of ground worn bare along a crooked willowed creek; along the foot of the gentle slope lay scores of *jacals* or brush huts.

Turmoil was there before them: shouts, yells, bark of dogs, figures running and galloping, sending out ominous waves of wrath to lash the faces of those who rode on. Straight ahead led McAllister, to the edge of the stunted piñons, within long shot of the dusty clutter and mob beyond. He drew rein.

"Muldoon!"

"Yes sirr!"

"Take my glasses; I'm going in alone. Form the men in line, hold them here, make use of what shade is available. You might take the opportunity to water the horses, by squads, at the handiest point—that bend of the creek on the left looks like the best place. I may be gone some time."

"Yes sirr. . . . And if you don't come back, sirr?"

"Act strictly on the defensive; if you try to rush that crowd, you'll make things worse. We must spar for time until more troops come; they'll be along presently. If they don't come in the course of the afternoon, draw off to a better position and wait for the relief."

"By Gawd, Left'nant, sirr!" Muldoon flamed in red wrath. "Here's half o' C Troop with fifty rounds and pistol loops full. Domn it, sirr! Barrin' the young lady, at first sign you're in trouble, we'd burn out that village with hellfire!"

HE met the cold, hard eyes of McAllister and fell back, grumbling.

Hutton edged up with a low word.

"Goin' in alone?"

"Yes. I speak Spanish well enough. One is plenty."

"True." The scout tugged at his beard, and spat. "True. Besias, he's 'Pache raised; they hold him a deserter. He'd not last two minutes. Haint no love for me, neither. They'd like to make my twelve toes dance on fire. Well, you aint dead yet, and won't be as long as you know it! Right-march, and like it!"

McAllister glanced at the growling sergeant, at Hutton thoughtfully championing, at the Mexican interpreter, pallid-cheeked, and pricked his horse. He rode down across the open to the clamorous village.

Brush summer huts, roofed with hides, haphazard, in no order; wafts of drying offal; curs snapping and yapping; screaming squaws and children. Men and bows pressed in upon him with taunt and threat of voice and gesture, a mob crazed by his uniform and the line of men upon the opposite slope.

Indians—a massed mob of them under the hanging dust. McAllister felt the panic within him, felt his stomach squirm as he faced the horse slap into them; his voice came dry and hoarse, in the Spanish they all knew.

"Cochise! I come to Cochise! Where is Cochise?"

They snarled back, pressed in closer, until a strapping warrior stilled their din with stentorian authority. He pointed. A lane formed, a savage lane; and McAllister rode on toward a larger *jacal*, isolated, marked by a lance and a red rag pennon planted beside the entrance. There too was a scrubby piñon tree.

McAllister stiffly swung to the ground. The thick-bodied Apache, slightly grayed, squatted in the scant shade of the piñon, waiting; behind, the half-circle of the mob, eyes hot, guns and bows ready. God, those eyes!

Eyes of the squatting chief, glittering, reptilian, filled with life. McAllister felt them in him like a knife-blade. Here was crisis; all his dread came to the surface and choked him. He tried to speak in stately Spanish words, but his mouth was dry. Wrung nerves shrieked through his body. The awful unreason-

ing dread that had been born in him seized hold upon him and palsied his voice.

It was the moment. Seize the Chief, play brave man's part, and the game was won! But he could not move. An instant later two other Indians moved up behind Cochise, and the opportunity was gone.

The Apache's broad wrinkled countenance settled dourly; a silent, scornful laugh curved his lips downward, and he spoke with scornful challenge, with amused contempt, as to a child.

"Shut up! I hear your voice, but I see your heart. It is small. Why don't they send me a man? Your men had better go home; you don't go. You'll pay for your foolishness. You whites are going to pay for what was done at Apache Pass when my brother was killed. I'm not afraid of the soldiers. Death is very close to you, rabbit-heart. You want to find the white girl. She is in that house. Go in, quick! Hide there, and don't come out again. Go!"

An Indian drew aside the entrance flap of the *jacal*.

ALMOST before he knew what he was doing, McAllister was stumbling in. Panic and terror and horror of himself filled him; his back was twitching; his palms were clammy, and a groan of despair was upon his lips.

He stepped in, and stumbled. The earth inside was excavated a foot deep to give standing-room. In the checkered gloom he heard a startled gasp, and a voice, her voice.

"Oh! You came here alone, to talk to gain time!" she exclaimed softly. "You wanted to find me, to help me—"



"Mr. McAllister! You! My father sent you?"

She sprang toward him, white, dismayed, disheveled, but with chin up. Fierce sunlight poured upon the roof and the brush-laced walls; rays through the crevices streaked the dusty air and spotted the floor with gold. McAllister shook hands, smiled wanly, tried to fight off the inner reaction.

"Yes. I was to talk you free; the talk didn't work," he said jerkily. "You—are not hurt?"

"No," she said.

He sat down, crossed his long legs with a show of ease, shifted his holstered revolver. She noted the weapon.

"Oh! Then you're not a prisoner! They didn't take the gun! You're here to talk with me?"

McAllister gathered himself together. He knew the miserable truth. Cochise had read his palsied heart, and scornfully disdained to disarm him. Rabbit-heart, the chief had called him. True—good God, true! And no help for it.

"I have a platoon of twenty men; they're across on the slope," he said. "More are coming. I sent back a courier. Unfortunately, Crook's at headquarters, two hundred miles east. I was ordered not to fight, but to talk."

Damned pusillanimous evasion! He had known the one thing to do, and had failed. But the girl's eyes brightened, dilated upon him.

"Oh! And you came here alone, to talk, to gain time!" she exclaimed softly. "I see! You wanted to find me, to try and help me—"

McAllister, stung to the quick, could have screamed out the hideous truth; every word she uttered twitched at his tormented nerves. Rabbit-heart!

"Listen! Don't fool yourself, Miss Nivens," he declared roughly. "Cochise wouldn't talk. I'm a prisoner with you—made a damned mess of things all around. I don't want to talk about it. I can't help you!"

He turned from her. Little more was said; a few questions, a few answers. His manner puzzled her, perhaps frightened her. He was aware of the girl's eyes searching him, troubled, meditative, mutely questioning. She was a mere child, and could not understand men, particularly this hard-eyed man who rebuffed her friendliness.

McAllister heard the occasional weary movements of his horse, close outside, as it changed legs, tossed its head, switched



at flies. It had not been touched or led away; Cochise was sure of himself, contemptuous, disdainful. Here was token to all the village of his authority, his power. . . .

Through the loosely fashioned brush wall, where he fingered a hole, McAllister could glimpse the piñon slope opposite, could see a few men of the platoon. Muldoon would have seen him disappear into the *jacal*, through the glasses.

The blether roundabout continued. The village did not like that silent line of waiting soldiers. Cochise did not like it. Probably the Chief was now debating with his head men and the "bad hearts" of the raiding-party.

Time dragged on, hot, sweaty, odorous. By the sun, noon had come and gone. A fresh commotion in the *rancheria* rocked the air, hurdled the brush hut with successive waves of yelling wrath, started the girl bolt upright. McAllister felt his own pulses hammering to it.

WHAT had happened? Impossible to know. View was now shut off by dust from racing ponies and running men. Muldoon, perhaps? The men could be held in no longer? That would mean twenty men dead in the open, and massacre.

McAllister freed his revolver and laid it in his lap, grim, sardonic, his lips curved in thin bitter lines. His father had died; he too could die, but uselessly, having achieved nothing. Rabbit-heart! The words burned into him with loathing.

Suddenly a voice of brass lifted upon the hot dusty air, a voice thin and silvery, far-off.

The girl leaped up, with shrill exultant words.

"Listen! Did you hear it? From Bowie! Did you hear the trumpet?"

That's an H Troop trumpeter! I know the key!"

McAllister sat with eye to peep-hole. Deploy! Afar, the faint trumpet-voice sounded again. H Troop? Absurd. Less than a hundred weary men and mounts. They could do nothing against this maddened mob of Apaches, stern warriors, fighters to the death.

ABRUPTLY, without warning, the entrance flap was ripped aside. Cochise burst in, rabid, sweated, borne upon a torrent of scalding rage. His voice rang at McAllister.

"Soldiers! Get out with me, you dog! You came to talk to me; now you talk to them. Tell them to go away before we burn them up. Tell them they'll see you eat fire. I'll fight Cluke. They'll see this girl eat fire!"

The trumpet sounded again upon the words, silvery, distant, thin. Words leaped into McAllister's brain.

"Right-face!"

Then he was up, clutching, shoving, scarce aware how it happened. Cochise recoiled and stiffened as the revolver jabbed into his wrinkled stomach. The hammer clicked, and he stiffened anew.

"The hell you say!" rejoined McAllister. "You'll do the talking. Tell your men not to fight, or you're dead. Tell them you're sending us to the soldiers. Send this woman on my horse. Turn around, damn you! Outside, and talk!"

As he spoke, McAllister put out his free hand to the Chief's braids, and clutched them. A grunt broke from Cochise, a grunt of protest. For a moment the two stood motionless, eye to eye, breast to breast.

The black eyes flared a wild, delirious hatred; all the flames of hell leaped up in their depths. The touch of the burly, powerful body, the smell of it—eye and touch and all other senses combined. Yet McAllister was aware of nothing, felt no recoil, knew only that he had seized his chance.

The black eyes clouded. "It is good," grunted Cochise, yielding, flinching. "I will talk."

A laugh, hard as his own hard gaze, escaped McAllister.

"Turn around. *March!*"

Cochise turned, warily; McAllister, warily tightened grip upon the braids and shifted the revolver, clapping the muzzle against the brown spine. With pistol and knee he prodded the Chief

forward, thrust him through the low exit and into sight of all men, shamed, seized, helpless.

A brief panorama met McAllister's sight. The extended line of troopers at the foot of the slope, in semicircle, sitting with carbines at the advance. The tossing tumultuous village, the warriors ranged, women running about; and here he stood with Cochise, scorched by murderous eyes, at hand-grips with the Apache of Apaches, and he had no fear, no recoil. By God, the flaw was conquered!

"Talk, damn you!" he ordered.

Cochise drew breath, filled his lungs, shouted over the silent staring red men. Warriors afoot and ahorse were quieted. The dust settled. Then—

"By Jupiter!" muttered McAllister, and himself fell to staring. Two riders had cantered down opposite, were coming forward alone. Crook himself! Crook, in his low round canvas hat and faded brown canvas clothes, on his mule "Apache," his famed shotgun across his lap, and a trumpeter at his heels. The General himself!

"Very well," grunted Cochise, half turning, desperate to save face. "You are a man. I was a fool when I met you; the sun was in my eyes. You need not shoot me. I will talk with the Gray Fox. I go to meet Cluke."

"Go ahead," said McAllister.

THE rest was a dream—the hubbub, the explanations, the dust and voices and men. All a dream; until, a little apart, McAllister was aware of Six-toed Hutton coming up to him, wearing a broad grin, as he extended a horny paw.

"Shake, by Gawd! What'd I tell you, huh? You done it. Had Cochise plumb in your pistol hand—neatest thing I ever seen! I knew you'd do it. What'd I tell you, huh?"

McAllister, gripping the rough hand, looked into the wise, searching eyes.

"I guess you've forgotten what you told me, really," he said. "It was a damned good motto for a soldier; and it did the trick."

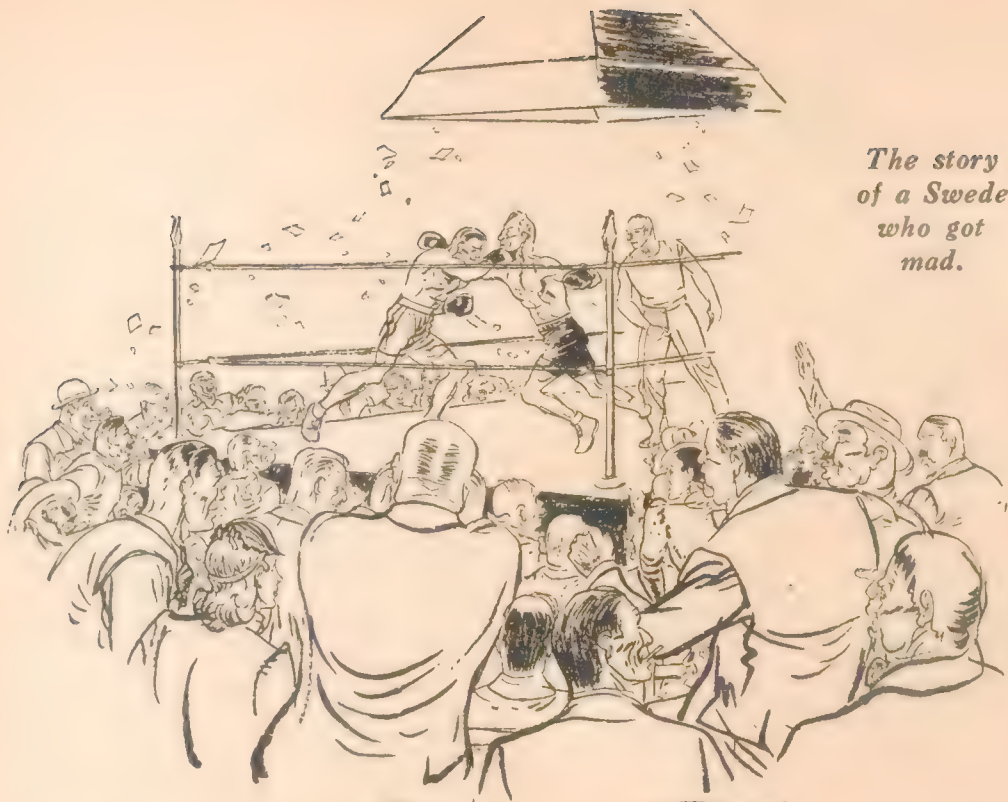
"Huh?" demanded the scout. "What was it?"

"When you hate a thing, then you've got to right-face and like it! Remember?"

"You're damned right," said Six-toed Hutton solemnly.

Another moving story in this fine Army series will be a feature of our next issue.

*The story
of a Swede
who got
mad.*



The Last Fight

By EUSTACE COCKRELL

HE looked around at the dressing-room, trying to see everything, note every tiny detail. He wanted to watch the worried face of Manny, his manager, that Manny thought was so impassive—that dark excitable face with its dead cigar that made the slightly off-center dot under the exclamation-point that was a nose. He wanted to watch Manny; but still he wanted to watch the gnarled hands of Nick, his little Greek chief second and trainer, moving lovingly, almost reverently as they kneaded his heavy brown legs. Those legs that looked so thick and solid and sinewy, but were his weakness. He wanted to suck into his nostrils that pungent, faintly acrid smell of liniment and long-dead cigars and dried sweat and soap. He wished that all his perceptions were sharper, to record this scene so he could always be able to recreate it in his mind. For in his heart he knew that in its actual reality it would never be repeated.

He knew, from the long years, the countless fights, the careful observation, that had kept him for ten long years champion among those men weighing between one hundred and forty-seven and one hundred and sixty, that tonight, in a few minutes, he would walk up the aisle, nodding to his friends, smiling, outwardly the same, and climb into the ring and—lose his title.

Christian Sturluson propped himself up on his elbows on the rubbing-table and pressed the half-lemon in his right hand to his mouth. He looked at the three newspaper men. They were talking among themselves, preparing to leave, to go up to the ringside, where they would watch the fight. They knew. Christian Sturluson knew they knew. He knew that Manny knew, that little Nick knew. It was almost as though the fight were over—almost as if they had brought him back to this dressing-room, and he was lying here on the table, the defeated champion. There was that in the air.

Christian Sturluson looked at his hands. They were big hands, heavy, competent. He had never had trouble with them. Plenty of work chopping wood, carrying as a kid two balls of newspapers that he was always squeezing. Squeezing and finally shredding, to be replaced by two more. Even as a kid welterweight pleading for a spot on a small card in some promoter's office, he remembered being laughed at as he unconsciously squeezed the two balls of paper. He had had a little more of an accent then, and that had made him funnier. They thought it funny when he solemnly informed them as a reward for a fight, he would come back and fight for them as champion.

But he had. All the little clubs that had helped him, all the small promoters that had given him spots as a kid; he'd come back and fought for them—as the Champion of the World.

There were laws, it seemed—immutable laws. A man might take a sound body, and a cool brain and by never deviating from his purpose, by never for a moment relaxing his will, parlay that asset into a million dollars. He had made a million dollars. Maybe more, in the last twelve years. He had fought often, and some of his opponents had been colorful fellows who might, just might possibly, find the chink in the armor and beat him. Until tonight no man had done that. . . . But there were laws.

It was a law of the ring, a law of nature that applied to those who lived by fighting other men with gloves upon their hands for the entertainment of a slightly sadistic populace and as good a cut in the gross as their managers could get, that the legs of a man went first. The hands were there, the good strong hands. The punch was there: the devastating hook, the lightning right cross, the blows to hurt and beat the man who absorbed them. But the legs of a man went first.

And Chris Sturluson's legs were gone. Sometime between the third and fifth

rounds they lost their resiliency. The extra tiny bit of elasticity, the ability to move and react instantaneously to reflex.

The reporters said something faintly cheerful to him, and one reached over and patted him on the back. Then they were gone.

Manny walked over to the table. He tilted back his black derby and looked down at the long muscled body; then his eyes strayed to the thin blond hair with the bald spot in the center, and Christian Sturluson could almost see him wince.

"Take it easy," Manny said, and his voice was edgy. "Take it easy."

Chris smiled his slow one-sided smile.

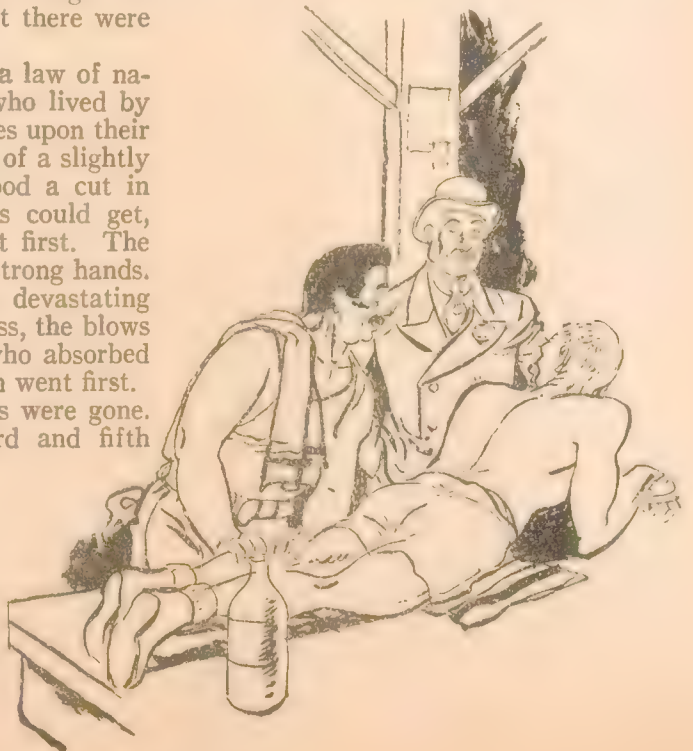
"As if the big squarehead wouldn't!" Manny muttered. "Nerves like a hog."

Christian Sturluson closed his eyes. His mind took him back to a night in Chicago when he had watched a great fighter stand helplessly in the center of the ring, and beckon with his gloved hand for his opponent to come in and fight. He didn't understand it then. He didn't know that when the great Jack Dempsey stood there and beckoned the backpedaling, still slightly dazed Tunney to come to him, that he, Jack Dempsey, could not go after him. . . . The legs went first.

On the hand of little Nick, the left hand so skillfully massaging, there was a ring. In the ring there glared out, like

Illustrated by
Lyle Justis

"Land, land, land!" said Manny. "Then it don't rain and—" "It will rain again," said Sturluson.



a white and baleful light, a stone. It was once a tiny stone. The night that Christian Sturluson had won the title, Nick had bought the ring. It was really the same ring: a symbol, a symbol of success. With each succeeding defense of his title, the stone had increased in size. Now it was enormous. Would it shrink when he had lost tonight? Would the diamond get smaller, and with each pitiful come-back attempt, get smaller still until it was gone? Because there would be come-back attempts. Yes, there must be. Maybe if he showed well, a return go with the champion.

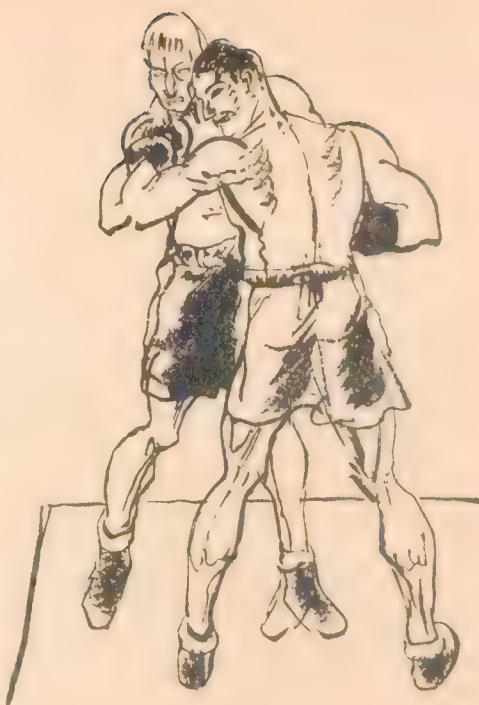
CHRISTIAN STURLUSON was broke. This night, at the age of thirty-four, he would step into the ring with his end of the purse already gone. Borrowed on and sent after that other money, all those dollars that he had made, and had tried to invest so carefully in the land—land that would produce, that they could not take from him. That would be his always, that he could live on and love, and raise blond boys on, now that he had found their mother.

She was sitting up there now. Sitting in a ringside seat, her big eyes serious and calm, with faith in her man shining out of them. She had never seen him fight, but she would see him fight tonight. His girl.

See him step out under those lights against a boy, smooth black hair glistening, white teeth shining, who could move like the wind and hit like a pile-driver. A Latin lad who would be an old man at thirty-four—but a lad who tonight could stay clear of Christian Sturluson for a few rounds, and thus be crowned.

He would have loved to fight this boy in the old days. This flash, who looked like nothing so much as swift flickering light as he flowed around the ring. This dark lad who would tantalize with long left hands, the tired bald Swede who plodded after him—and in the old days would have caught him. Would have caught up with him sometime in the middle of the fight, and then begun a methodical campaign to bring him down, a quivering husk, in the thirteenth or fourteenth round.

He could see that fight; he could plan it, lying here now. He could feel his muscles warming and loosening as that fight progressed. He could feel himself getting stronger and faster as he piled on the pace. He could almost see the dark face getting desperate as he kept



crowding in. That was as it would be in the old days.

But tonight he would be through, practically, sometime around the sixth round; and tonight he could not catch this lad in six rounds. Then he would be beaten. From sometime near the sixth round until the fifteenth, he would be beaten because he could not move. . . . If the fight went fifteen rounds.

Manny Roberts threw down his dead cigar. He cocked an ear, hearing the applause above him in the stadium. "It won't be long now," he said. Then he turned to Christian Sturluson lying there before him, and added viciously: "Why couldn't you listen to nobody? Land, land, land! The good earth! Then it don't rain, and the damn' stuff blows away. You don't catch no clothin'-store nor no saloon, nor no apa'tment-house blowin' away because it don't rain."

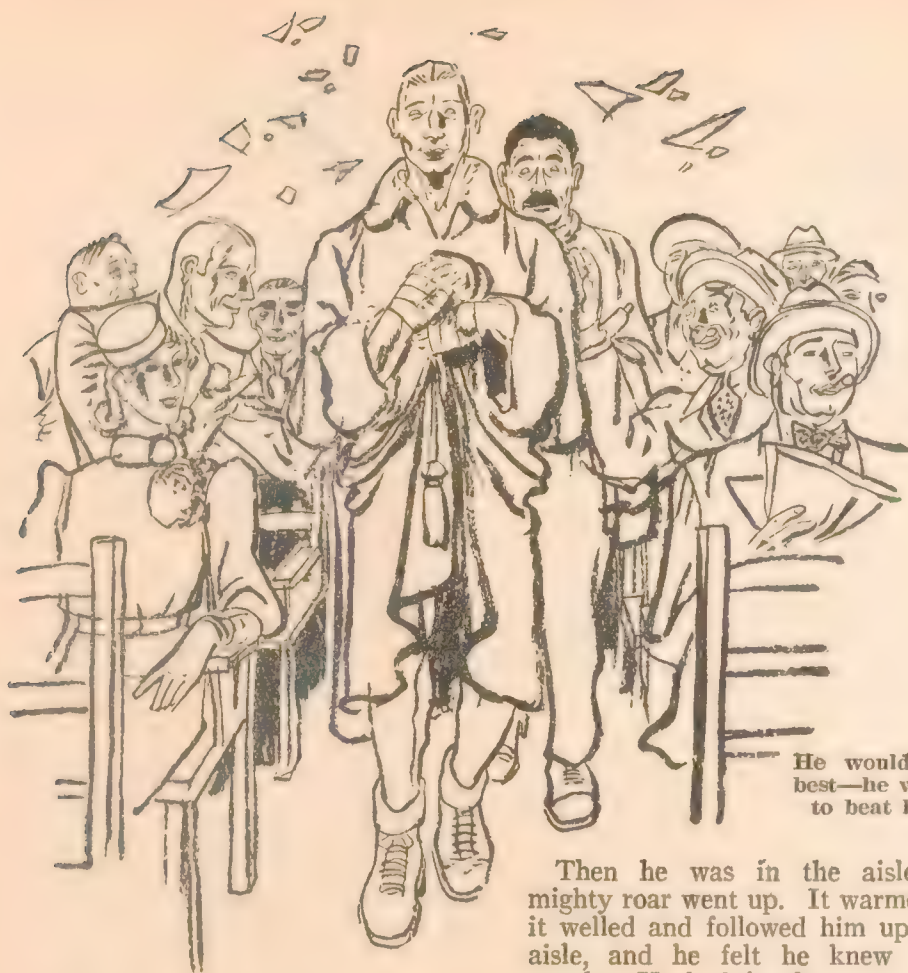
"It will rain again," Christian Sturluson said placidly. "And the taxes must be paid."

"A million bucks! A cool million bucks you've kicked off! You ought to have your head examined."

"I have some splendid farms," Christian Sturluson said. "They will be fine when it rains again."

"He owns half the dust-bowl," Manny Roberts said, to little Nick. "He's the la chumperoo de luxe, when they talk dirt to him."

"I did not expect the men to cheat me," Sturluson said, "about the land."



He would do his best—he would try to beat his age.

"He never tells me what he's doin' with his dough. All these years he never tells me. I got a brother makes pearl buttons in Joisey. Doubled his money, I woulda. But no, don't tell me. I'm just his manager. Now he has borrowed on his purse and bought the rest of Oklahoma, and paid the taxes that he owed on Kansas."

Nick looked up and grinned. "Why not he should sella some of his land, and then he has money, and his taxes, it's smaller?"

"I do not sell land," Chris said shortly. They didn't understand, of course. How could they? They didn't—

"All right," a voice from the opened door said, and four men filed in. Two were from the camp of Angelo Lazia, and one was from the Commission. They watched solemnly, in silence, as Nick began bandaging Christian Sturluson's big hands. There were no complaints. Manny had gone to watch the bandaging of Angelo's hands. Christian Sturluson stuck his arms into the arm-holes of his heavy white bathrobe, and pulling it around him, began walking toward the door. He said no word.

Then he was in the aisle, and a mighty roar went up. It warmed him as it welled and followed him up the long aisle, and he felt he knew all these people. He had fought many times for them, and each time he had done his best. And each time he had won. Tonight he would do his best. He would go all out to try and beat his age. But his heart told him that he couldn't. . . . Then he was in the ring. Angelo Lazia half smiled, half sneered across the ring at him. Christian Sturluson smiled back.

He felt relieved. It would be over soon. The gnawing realization that had first come to him, when he started training for this fight that he was old, was gone. He *knew* that he was old, and he was glad, almost, that it would soon be over.

Just one regret—just one regret! He needed money. He needed money to get started. He needed money to bring his farms to profit, to tide him over until the rains. To get married on. He would like to get married tomorrow, and go out to his land, lying in one magnificent square of countless rolling acres, and get to work on it himself. He hated the idea of the come-back—the come-back that never came off. He had viewed with pity champions who had tried it in the past. Now he must do it. . . . This—this would soon be over.

Sitting on his stool, he looked down at his legs. Manny had taken off his bathrobe, and Nick had laced on the new gloves. The bathrobe was draped over his shoulders now, and he was waiting to go to the center of the ring for his instructions.

Then he was in the center of the ring. The referee was an old friend of his. He smiled at him, and he smiled into the face of Angelo Lazia. The referee seemed to be giving special attention to some matters of heeling, and rabbit-punches. Chris Sturluson looked up, mildly surprised, but he saw that the referee was directing his remarks chiefly to his opponent.

Angelo Lazia grinned at the referee. "'And that's how I knew that Old Man Mose was dead,'" he sang. Somebody in Angelo Lazia's corner laughed.

Christian Sturluson hardly heard. He was looking down into the big gray eyes of Anna Nelson sitting in a press seat, beside Williams of the *Blade*. Anna smiled at him; and her smile hurt him, it was so full of quiet certainty.

Then he went back to his corner.

He came out slowly with the bell, the thought in his mind that he must go the route to get a return fight. Angelo Lazia glided in and flicked him twice with long left hands, and tempted him with feints and deceptive half-openings to follow him.

Chris bore in, but Lazia was gone, and he smiled at his stupidity. They wanted him to move—to follow this wraith until his legs were tired, and then it would be soon over.

BUT that was the only way he knew to fight—to crowd. Fifteen years of fighting, and never a backward step. He must try to unlearn that, make Lazia bring the fight to him; that was his only chance. But Lazia didn't do it.

And so Chris moved in. He had to. Some compulsion to crowd, to get in, to fight, made him move forward. When he went back to his corner, Manny hissed bitter words into his ear.

"Let him come to you. Don't chase him. You won't be able to stand up, by the sixth. Make him come to you, and work on his belly. Tie him up. Hold him, ride him. And for God's sake, don't play tag with him."

Chris Sturluson nodded. He knew Manny was right. But what difference did it make? Manny didn't know that already, as he sat there, he could feel a telltale tiny tremble in his right calf. He went out with the bell.

He wasn't warm yet, really. He hadn't got loosened up, and yet his left leg trembled slightly when he sat down. Standing, going out to meet the man before him, it felt all right. How long would it feel all right?

Christian Sturluson felt uneasy for the first time in his life. . . .

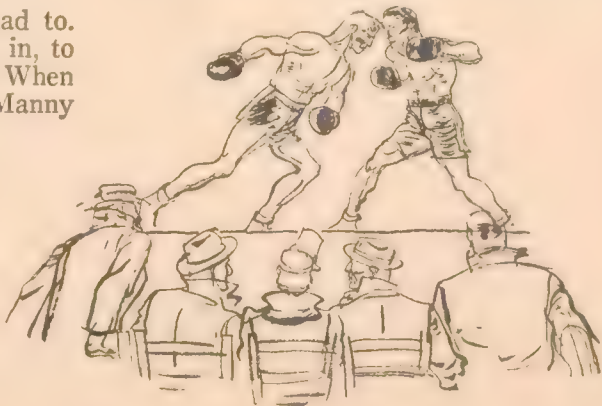
He crowded in, knowing he shouldn't, and jockeyed Lazia to a corner and hit him a short solid right above the heart. Lazia's face let a funny look cross it before he danced free. But in an instant he was smiling his insolent smile, dancing provocatively away. Chris Sturluson smiled to himself with the knowledge that five years before, he would have murdered this rather ill-mannered lad. That punch had hurt him. Chris Sturluson moved in. With the bell, he allowed his eyes to drift to Anna Nelson, and he smiled into her eyes with what he hoped was reassurance.

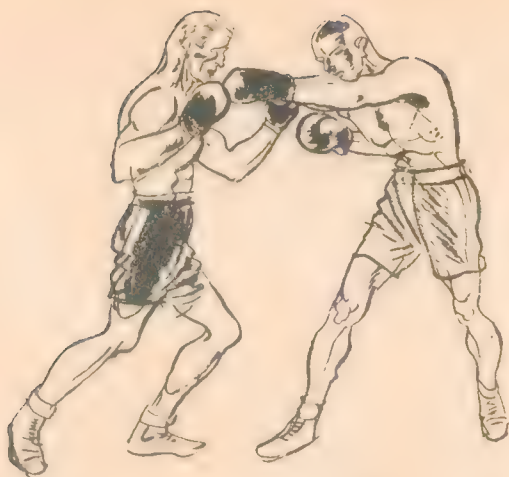
Angelo Lazia saw that by-play. He laughed to his handlers. "This," he said, "is gonna be fun."

"Please," Manny was pleading. "Please get it through that billiard-ball of yours that you can't beat this boy in no foot-race. Let him come to you. You'll get tired, and he'll cut you to ribbons—"

"I know that," Chris Sturluson said. "I'm sorry. I can't change my way of fighting." He paused. "I guess," he

"Kill the big squarehead, Angelo!" Anna Nelson screamed.





finished, "I'm too old." He said it calmly. And Nick, rubbing his stomach, noticed that there was a tiny tremble in his legs.

The bell brought Chris out.

Manny looked helplessly at Nick. Christian Sturluson moved doggedly forward. "He knows," Manny said. "But he aint got the nerves of a good well-bred hog."

Angelo Lazia noticed that something was not as it had been. Christian Sturluson came into him, and he worked into a clinch. The old man was fading early, Angelo decided. He would have some fun.

"How come," he said into Chris' battered left ear as the referee came to part them, "you rate a classy dame like that? I got a good notion to take her over too, along with the title."

Chris smiled to himself at this awkward attempt to upset him, and pushed free of the clinch. It amused him to think of this conceited boy and Anna. How she would hold up her proud head if this boy with the greasy hair would make so much as an attempt to speak to her. But still it gave him a funny feeling, and he broke from the clinch, and his effort to swing a right left him open, and Angelo Lazia hit swiftly and opened a cut beneath Christian Sturluson's left eye.

Manny didn't speak to him when he went to his corner. Not for ten seconds. Then suddenly he asked:

"How come," Angelo said as the referee came to part them, "you rate a classy dame like that? I got a good notion to take her over too."

"What was you gabbin' about? Who could run fastest?"

He worked with swift expertness on the eye. "What was you thinkin' about when he clipped you?"

Chris answered the first question methodically. "He was teasing me about Anna," he said. The bell prevented his answering the second.

The tremble was in his legs, and he could feel the presence of these thousands of people that he would disappoint. He could hear them. The working press at the ringside, the gamblers. He knew the welling sounds that had come so often to his ears; but he moved forward, because he had to move forward.

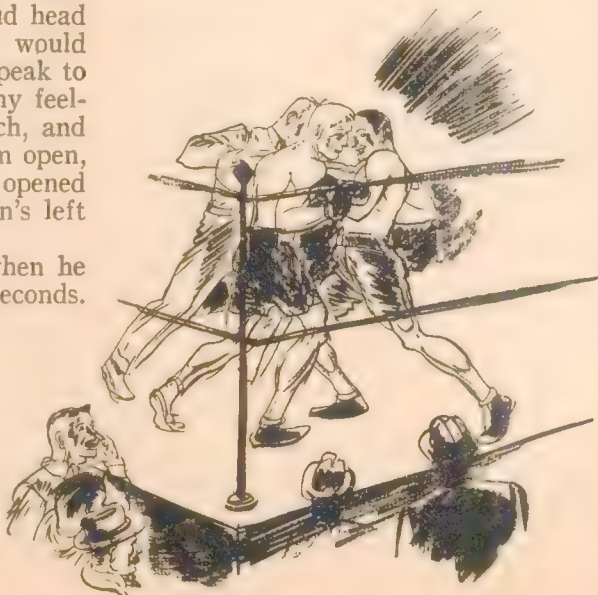
He looked at Anna, and he saw that Manny was talking to Anna. And that Williams of the *Blade* was nodding and smiling. All this with the corner of his eyes; and he bored in, trying to catch on shaky legs the man who was not there.

Angelo Lazia taunted him from long range. With long lefts and with words.

"A bald-headed old man like you shouldn't have a dame like that," he said. "After I knock your ears off, I figure I'll just move in."

SOMETHING entirely unfamiliar welled up in Christian Sturluson's breast when he heard that; and he rushed in, swinging wildly. Then suddenly he was sitting on the floor, and the referee said "*Four*."

And above the tumult and the shouting, he heard a voice—a voice he could not mistake.



"Kill the big squarehead, Angelo!" Anna Nelson screamed.

"Five," the referee intoned. And from that point on, Chris ceased to think methodically. A thousand thoughts welled in his brain. And through the pink haze that came before his eyes, he saw only the pretty face of Angelo Lazia, and thought of the pretty face of Anna Nelson. Angelo Lazia's face would change. He would change it. Anna Nelson he hated.

He rose at nine with some animal cunning, and swayed, feigning grogginess so well that he brought Angelo Lazia toward him for the kill. Then Christian Sturluson, who in all his thirty-four years had never before been mad, moved to meet his rival, and the crowd came to its feet in sheer hysteria.

Christian Sturluson went in clubbing. Both great arms swinging, wide open. He caught a hard right that cut his eyebrow and sent blood dripping, and he shook his head and went on in—both hands down, swinging murderously, amateurishly, awkwardly. But with power.

Angelo Lazia danced away, and a long right whistling far behind his head reached him as he drew back and set him on the floor.

Christian Sturluson stood over him and cursed him in long words rich with consonants, and the referee dragged at his arm to get him to a neutral corner. He turned, almost hit the referee, in unrecognition; and Angelo Lazia got to his feet and fled. But he couldn't get out of the ring.

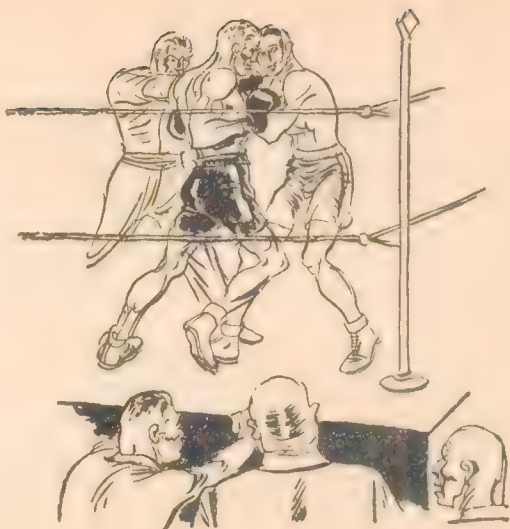
Christian Sturluson shook his head with a mad rage when he turned and saw his quarry gone. He lowered his head and turned around. Then he plunged, his hands low, at Angelo Lazia; and he made a sight designed for terror. Bald head, blond hairy chest matted with blood, and incarnate fury in his square and battered face.

Angelo Lazia stood back and tried desperately to box.

A clubbing-long left hook sent him crashing down. And Christian Sturluson would not move. The rich Scandinavian profanity rolled out of him and welled out above the uproar of the crowd. The referee dragged bravely at his arm, and finally Chris remembered something, and moved to a far corner.

And there he stood.

Angelo Lazia wasn't out. He had been hurt, but he wasn't out. But he wouldn't get up. He cowered on the floor, and his



eyes begged protection from all that he could see. And he was counted out.

People were climbing into the ring now: Manny, screaming; a policeman; and the referee was reaching for Christian Sturluson's arm to hold it aloft when Angelo Lazia, deeming it safe, got up.

Christian Sturluson threw the referee aside and moved swift as a striking snake. In an instant he had Angelo Lazia in his hands and above his head, and he walked to the ring apron and threw him through the air at Anna Nelson as a man would throw a rotten apple; and to Anna Nelson he directed a fierce remark in his native tongue as Angelo Lazia bounced crazily on the upraised hands of the reporters. Then the policeman had him.

CHRIS was lying on the table, and he knew that he had lost. But he was glad that it was over. No more anything. He was through. He looked up at the face above his, and heard the great tumult in the dressing-room. Anna Nelson smiled at him. Christian Sturluson smiled back his slow and crooked smile.

"Something happened to me," he said. "It was something about you. Something like a bad dream. Did I fight well? Did I lose like a champion?"

Anna Nelson couldn't say anything. Manny Roberts was beside her and little Nick, and they were looking at him.

It was little Nick who finally spoke, who said the words. "The morning papers is out," he said. "They say heavy general rains all over the Middle West." And on his right hand, as he rubbed Christian Sturluson's leg, his great ring gleamed bigger, it seemed, and more baleful than ever.

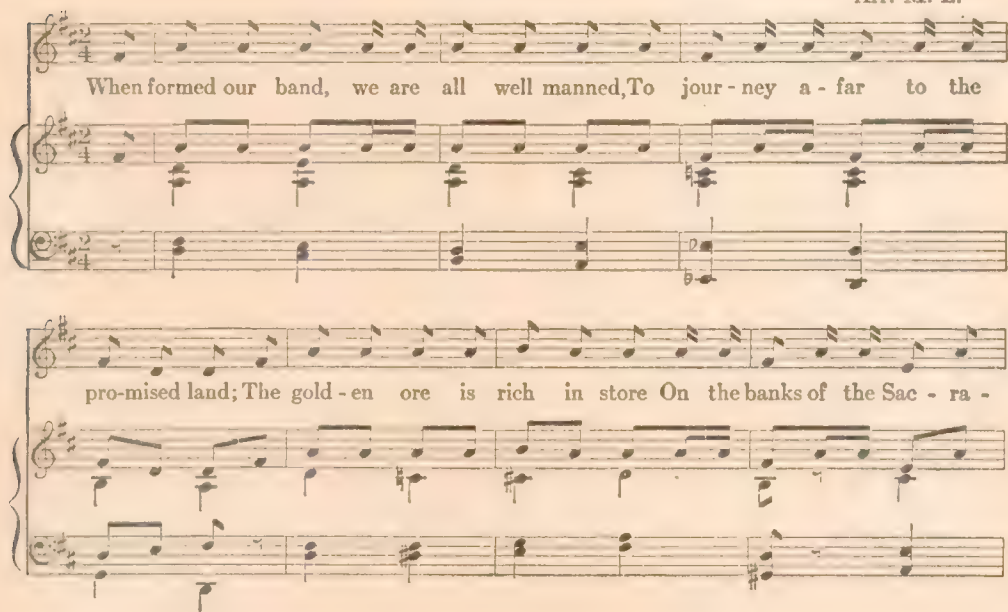
Made in America

California

SHORTLY after the young Congressman, Abraham Lincoln, came home from Washington and settled down again to the practice of law in Springfield, Illinois, there were announcements in newspapers occasionally, such as, "All who are interested in the California expedition will meet at candlelight to-night in the court house." California then was a place to talk about, to guess and wonder about. News came from Sutter's Creek: ten men shook pay dirt through hand screens and found a million dollars apiece in gold nuggets; the

San Francisco city council adjourned without setting a date when it would meet again, churches closed their doors, newspapers stopped printing, ships lay in harbor with no sailors, cooks and soldiers ran away from military forts. A free-for-all rush started to the gold diggings: a spade sold for \$1,000.00. It was news that made New York and London sit up. Across the Great Plains came wagon trains; in ten miles along the Platte River a traveler counted 459 wagons. At the trail's end was gold and California.

Arr. M. L.

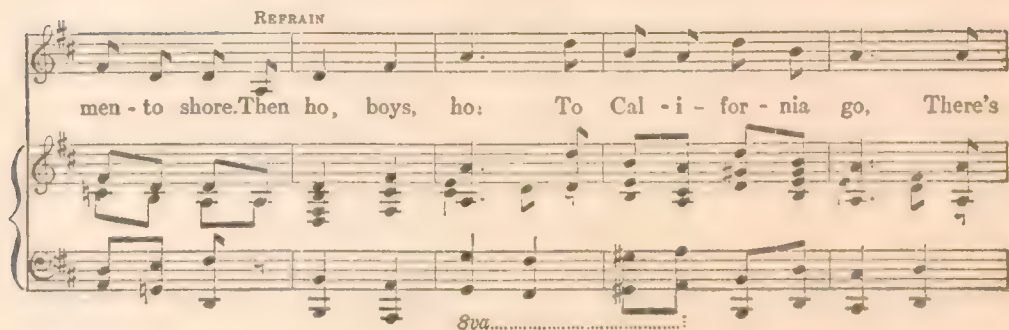


Several hundred of these pioneer songs have been gathered by Carl Sandburg, and published

Guaranteed Antiques of Song and Story

Edited by CARL SANDBURG

Author of "Abraham Lincoln," "The People, Yes," etc.



1 When formed our band, we are all well
manned,
To journey afar to the promised land;
The golden ore is rich in store
On the banks of the Sacramento shore.

Refrain:

Then ho, boys, ho! To California go,
There's plenty of gold in the world, I'm told,
On the banks of the Sacramento shore.

2 As oft we roam o'er the dark sea's foam,
We'll not forget kind friends at home,
But memory kind still brings to mind
The love of friends we left behind.

Refrain:

3 We'll expect our share of the coarsest fare,
And sometimes sleep in the open air,
On the cold damp ground we'll all sleep sound
Except when the wolves go howling round.

Refrain:

4 As we explore to the distant shore,
Filling our pockets with the shining ore,
How it will sound as the shout goes round,
Filling our pockets with a dozen of pounds.

Refrain:

5 The gold is there almost anywhere;
We dig it out rich with an iron bar,
But where it is thick, with spade or pick
We take out chunks as big as a brick.

Refrain:



in book form by Harcourt, Brace and Company, under the title "The American Songbag."

Heat

THE stirring story of a man whose job sent him to put on a "hot-papa suit" of asbestos in order to cap a flaming oil-well.

By
RALPH
CONDON

Illustrated
by Gratton
Condon
(Who is not
related to
the author)



THE Number Nine well had been burning five days when Buck Malloy flew in from the Coast. Its wicked plume of smoke showed up while the big transport was still thirty miles out of Tulsa, and the color told him that it was a highest fire. He knew that it was a bad one, or old Dan wouldn't have sent for him; and his nerves began to tighten up the way they always did when he knew he was going to put on an asbestos suit and go in under the flame for a capping job.

Katherine Chase was waiting at the airport with a pick-up. She made a trim, erect little figure in a belted polo coat; but her face looked tired and strained. She gave him her hand and said:

"It was grand of you to come, Buck."

Buck said, "Hello, Kay," and stood looking down while his mind ran back

through the months since an offer of big pay had taken him away from her. He knew that she had wanted to go with him then almost as much as he had wanted her to, but she hadn't gone; they both knew she never would, as long as her father and younger brother were in this business that kept her fine wide eyes always shadowed with fear.

Memory made them both a little awkward for a moment, and Katherine asked if he had had his lunch. He told her he'd eaten on the plane, so they went out to the truck and started for the oilfield.

Buck just sat back for the first mile or two watching the girl's profile, and liking the way she put the machine over the road with a strong, sure hand. There were many things he wanted to say, but he didn't know how to get started, so he asked about old Dan and the crew.

Monkey



"Dad's the way he always is after five days on a fire," Katherine said resignedly. "His hands are scorched; his eyebrows are gone; and he's dead for sleep; but he's still on his feet running the show. We picked a bad one this time, Buck."

"As bad as the Signal King?"

"It's worse in some ways. The base jet is narrower, and there isn't so much ground heat, but the thing is harder to get at. The shafting comes right up through the sump, and they'd dynamited the casing-head off before we got here."

"That always helps," Buck said, and made a face. "I suppose you've already tried drowning it?"

"Dad tried hydraulic flooding for three days, but there's enough pressure to blow through. This well was throwing five thousand barrels a day before lightning touched it off."

Buck whistled softly. "Well, that's enough fuel to make a very tidy little blaze, and I suppose the owners are yelling bloody murder for a cap?"

"Of course," Katherine said, and her voice carried the fear she felt of that job. "They had the sump all pumped out again, and were rigging the go-devil when I left."

Buck looked quizzically at the girl.

"This must be a two-man job; and how does your old fire-snapper Rock



Tenney said harshly: "I see you got yourself set for some

Tenney like the idea of going in under the torch with me? You might happen to remember that I'm not one of Rock's favorite people."

The girl turned around and looked straight at him before she said:

"Rock has a broken arm."

Buck said slowly: "Your kid brother hasn't had enough experience for a job like that."

"No," Katherine said very quietly. "Dad won't let Ken go; he's going himself. That's why I made him send for you."

Buck Malloy pulled in a long, explosive breath, then caught himself and held it. Her father was sixty now; and sixty is twenty years too old for the

blast-furnace heat of a capping job. But it wasn't going to help the girl any to rub in something that already had her sick with fear; so he just said, "Sure, that was the right thing to do," and kept the conversation on other subjects for the rest of the ride.

DAN CHASE looked as Katherine had described him—scorched and hollow-eyed from lack of sleep, but still going strong. A tired grin broke the sooty lines of his face as he came out to meet the truck and shake hands with Buck.

"This is a hell of a long way to have you come, son, but we sure need you right about now. This blamed torch has us backed off in a corner."



real publicity this time."

The sludge-smeared Ken was glad to see Buck, too, and said so; but Rock Tenney wasn't, and he didn't make any bones about it. He stood in the door of the tool-house, his left arm in a sling across his chest, and his right thumb hooked over his belt, while he surveyed Buck with a hostile eye.

Rock Tenney was a blocky, square-jawed little man. He was one of the best heat-monkeys in the business, but he had hated Buck Malloy ever since Buck had put a cap on the Signal King fire after he had given it up. Anyone who had ever met Rock, knew he had courage to spare; but the newspapers had given him a bad deal after the Signal King affair. They had hinted that he

had been afraid to try again, and Rock had always blamed Buck for that story. When the same publicity had brought Buck Malloy a fat job as a Hollywood stunt man, and he had gone, taking Katherine's heart along, Rock's hatred had had more fuel. Being shoved out now with a broken arm wasn't helping his feelings a bit.

Buck shook hands with Ken, and then nodded at Tenney.

"Hello, Rock. Tough luck about the arm."

Tenney stepped forward then and said harshly: "Tough luck, hell! It's right down your alley! And I see you got yourself set for some real publicity this time."

Buck said: "Huh?" Then his jaw went shut with a snap as he spotted a news-reel sound-truck parked over beyond the west rim of the sump. He hesitated a moment, wishing Rock hadn't a broken arm, then turned on his heel and said shortly:

"All right, Dan, let's have a look at this thing."

IT didn't take Buck very long to size up the situation; and he didn't like it.

The big-wheeled metal shelter they called the "go-devil" was lined up on its cables, and the capping equipment was ready; but there were some angles that didn't suit Buck at all.

When the water had been pumped out of the sump, it had left more than an inch of live oil that hadn't been hosed into the mud, and there was just enough natural wind crossing the flame-suction to knock down some mean fire-banners if there was any break in that heat draft. Buck remarked on this when they got back to the tool-shed, and Rock Tenney said nastily:

"This aint Hollywood, guy. We don't fake our stunts in this racket!"

Buck's nerves were tight, and the words ran his temper up. He spun around furiously and cut back:

"Listen, punk: it's enough like Hollywood so you're using a double; and if you didn't have a busted wing, I'd shove your wise-cracks down your neck!"

"I'll go you with one," Tenney yelled, and started toward him, but Dan Chase jammed him back on his heels.

"Rock, you keep your mouth shut! We've got all the fighting we want with the fire! We're going to do this Buck's way. If he wants that stuff hosed in, we'll hose it in!"



Buck took another look at the wind-whip in the flame.

"All right, Dan, let's go. They can keep us hooded with the water-jets, and I suppose the owners are howling about every hour she burns."

"You ought to hear 'em," Dan growled. "You'd think we were the guys that lit it, and our bonus is going down two hundred and fifty bucks a day."

NOBODY said much while the two men got into the huge asbestos suits. Ken helped get his father's gear in shape, and Katherine adjusted Buck's straps, her hands swift and steady even though her face was a drawn white mask. She managed to be a little slower than her brother, so they were alone for a moment in the tool-house.

She stood before him, looking straight up into his eyes. "I—I'm counting on you, darling. You know Dad isn't so young, and—"

Her voice caught, and Buck gave her a quick, reassuring hair-muss with his clumsy padded hands.

"Hey, quit it, kid! This is going to be all right. This is going to be swell, and you and I have a date to take the tick out of Tulsa's clock tonight!"

He grinned and bent to kiss her before he hauled his helmet on.

Outside, on the rim of the sump, they had a hand windlass where Big Joe Wilson, the roustabout, paid out the slack of the men's individual safety-lines. Buck gave his last terse orders there while the belts were being hooked on; then the two of them went in under the steel roof of the go-devil, and signaled to Ken, who threw the switch on the power winch that started them going.

"I—I'm counting on you, darling," Katherine said. "You know Dad isn't so young, and—" Her voice caught.

The go-devil shelter moved slowly down the rim and out into the heavy sludge, its cable coming down onto the revolving drum from the highline rigging beyond the sump, and paying out again to make the backing drag. The men didn't ride; they inched along on foot, hugging close to the asbestos-lined wall on either side of the tool platform.

Once under way, they could exchange no word; but that grim, familiar job called for no talk. There was a hinged collar-valve to be slapped around the casing and bolted on. If they made it, the valve could be screwed shut with a universal shaft through a shutter in the go-devil, and the fire would be licked—if the bolting set held the pressure. If it didn't, there was a lot of things that could happen—and they were all bad.

Halfway out, the heat was starting to run up, and Buck Malloy heard the roaring hiss of water as the crossing arms of two hydraulic streams were cut in before them. It ran the black slop up above his ankles, but he knew the pumps were going to keep the sump level down, and he swung his attention back to Dan.

The old fire-eater was moving carefully and easily, making every motion count. He signaled O.K., with a hand.

Buck grinned to himself and took some oxygen. What Dan didn't have in youth, he made up in brains and guts. He was still a top man to go in with.

Close to the jet the fierce up-suck of wind drowned the voice of the fire; and when there was only eight feet to go, Buck Malloy waved at Ken to stop the drum. The two men moved swiftly after that. Chase caught the lever that released the plate door in the front of the go-devil, and Buck Malloy threw his weight against it to swing its bottom up

in front, so that it made a narrow steel roof reaching within two feet of the rushing pillar of oil.

Dan went through first; and Buck was just moving to follow, when hell broke loose! One of the hydraulic streams struck the column of oil just below the combustion point, and for the fraction of time the sweeping draft was disturbed. In that instant the cross-wind struck down with a blinding banner of fire that turned the sump's whole surface into a raging inferno!

From the inside, the flame looked black; and through a terrible curtain of it, Buck Malloy saw Dan slip and go down waist-deep into the casing pit. He thrust forward with every ounce of his strength to catch the older man; but at the second he moved, his safety-line went tight and yanked him back.

The next moments were a deadening horror to Buck Malloy. He saw Dan's line go tight, but the man's body was jammed in the pit, and he didn't come.

Buck caught wildly at the go-devil's frame as he struggled against his own belt, but the windlass was turning fast, and his hands were torn from the hot steel. Struggling, he yelled helplessly, spun around to signal, but the curtain of flame cut off his sight from the rim of the sump. He knew that something was wrong with Dan's safety-line, that it must have slipped or broken from its winding, and he tried desperately to get free of his own; but the coupling was at the back, and the fireproof suit would not let his arms bend around. Halfway across that lake of fire he lost his footing and went down; the windlass dragged him on, and he didn't find his feet again until he was at the bottom of the rim. He jerked up there and started to wave his arms; then some great crushing weight caught him and hurled him back. As he went down and lost consciousness, he knew vaguely that there had been an outside explosion, and thought of the two oxygen tanks that had lain close to the windlass.

Fire closed over him again, and things went black.

WHEN Buck Malloy came to, he ached in every inch of his body, and he heard a strange voice saying above the roar in his ears:

"His heart's all right, and he probably isn't hurt much except for shock. That suit of his seems to have held together pretty well."

For a dulled moment Buck tried to convince himself that they were talking about old Dan; but that hope was smashed out of him by Rock Tenney's high-pitched, furious voice:

"All right? The damn' yellow rat ought to be dead! He left the boss! He left the boss stuck, and run to save his own hide! Damn him—" Emotion choked Rock's voice off then, and Buck got his swollen eyes open and struggled to rise.

A young ambulance doctor said: "Take it easy now. Take it easy." But Malloy shoved him aside and said hoarsely:

"Dan—is he—"

Tenney leaned down over him, his lips twisting convulsively.

"You should ask, you quitter! After you run and left him to die!"

BUCK'S gaze ran across the sump. The base fire was out, leaving just that one great geyser of flame over the well. The go-devil had been hauled back to the rim again; and from somewhere 'way off to the east, he heard the thin wail of a siren heading for Tulsa.

"Oh God," he said thickly. "Oh, my God—but I never left him, Rock! I was pulled away—Big Joe hauled me in!"

Tenney's teeth made a sneering, derisive line.

"Then why didn't the boss come with you? You was both hooked to the same rig! What the hell you trying to get by with?"

Buck struggled to his feet and stood swaying before the snarling Tenney.

"Go ask Joe! Go ask him—"

"Shut up!" Rock Tenney screamed. "Joe's dead! You know it! Now get out of here. Get out before I kill you myself! You're through, washed out of oil for good. You'll get all the publicity you want out of this, you—" The man's words strangled him, and he spun around to stamp away.

Buck's eyes sought the windlass. Only the base of it remained on the rim; the rest was a tangled mass of cables and cranks half submerged in the sludge of the oil-sump. He had been right about the oxygen-tanks exploding.

He turned back to the ring of men who still stood around him; but he saw only cold contempt in their set faces.

The young doctor said gravely: "You'd better come in to the hospital for some observation. The first ambulance was filled up with burn cases, but you were

If he could find the valve that Rock had been trying to set— On hands and knees he started through the blistering surface toward the center of the pit.



knocked out for over an hour, and you may have internal—”

“Observation, hell!” Buck Malloy told him. “But I want to get to that hospital. Let’s go!” He got his bag from the tool-shed and climbed in the back with the doctor.

For a few miles he didn’t say anything at all, because there was just one ques-

tion tearing at his mind, and he had to build up his courage to ask it. He got it out at last.

“Doc, there was a girl. Was she—”

“You’d better lie down,” the doctor said. “No, she wasn’t burned. Her brother was, and three other men, but the girl was all right except for a little cut on the face.”

“How about the brother? How about those others, how bad—”

“Well, you can’t tell much about burns at first, but I don’t think any of them were very bad except the old man that was—” The doctor broke off and said: “Listen, will you lie down, for God’s sake? You’re not in very good shape yourself.”

But Buck didn’t lie down. Instead, he started to climb out of his overalls, and

by the time they rolled into the hospital driveway, he had his suit on.

They told him that the four burned men were going to be all right, and that Miss Chase was with her brother, but they wouldn't let him go in. Buck kicked up a row over that, so in the end they sent a nurse to see if he could be admitted. She was gone only a moment, and she seemed a little embarrassed when she came back.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Malloy."

"Well, look," Buck demanded, "I've got to go in. I—"

"I'm sorry," the nurse said, stiffly this time. "Miss Chase says that neither she nor her brother wishes to see you."

Buck stood dead still for a moment, forgetting the aches of his body before the pain that came from the inside. Then he turned and went dully out into the street. He caught a southbound plane into Dallas that evening, and was back in Los Angeles before noon the next day.

THE movie stunt business was very good for Buck in the next six months—good because he got a swiftly built reputation of being a fool who would do any crazy thing that the smart boys turned down. He did everything from racing flaming automobiles to being swept over waterfalls, and he spent five weeks in hospitals; but he couldn't keep that Oklahoma fire out of his every waking hour.

In those six months he heard of Katherine Chase and her brother twice, both times through the impersonal pages of an oilman's journal that he still took. The first time there was just a notice which said the Chase Fire Suppression Company was still carrying on after the death of its founder, and that they had licked a fire in South Texas.

He saw the second item the day they discharged him from Hollywood's Good Samaritan Hospital, where he'd been for three weeks with a torn hip.

The Chase unit had come to the Coast. They had trucked their equipment out to the Ventura field to make a try at killing the great Grizzly Two fire that had been burning for almost a year, and had been given up by every outfit in the country.

As soon as Buck read the story, he made up his mind that he'd keep away from there. He told himself that he wasn't going, and kept right on telling himself until the next morning, when he got in his roadster and started the seventy-mile drive to Ventura.

Buck didn't drive fast, because he didn't know what he was going to do when he got there. He thought of going to Katherine and Ken and saying: "Look, I didn't leave Dan, and you've got to listen!" But he knew he couldn't do that, because they hated him too much to listen. He knew that about all he could do was drive around by the fire without getting close enough to be recognized, and hope he'd at least catch a glimpse of the straight, slim little figure that was always in his thoughts.

IT was around ten o'clock when he pulled into a service station the other side of Ventura and asked the way to Grizzly Two.

"You go straight out for a couple of miles," the attendant said, "and take the first main—" He broke off as the screaming wail of sirens ripped the air, and an ambulance and a pulmotor truck went racing by. "Maybe those guys'll take you there," the man shouted above the din. "There's some guys working on the fire and—"

But Buck was gone. He slammed his roadster out of the station in a hail of flying gravel, and straightened her into the highway with a howl of tires.

The emergency units were rolling, and he didn't catch them until they made the turn-off two miles out. He stuck tight on their tails after that, riding the hole they cleared, making no bid to pass.

They went roaring down a hill into the forest of derricks which made the great Ventura field. Ahead, he could see a pall of wind-flattened smoke stretching for miles to the east, and Buck took a long, hard breath as his nerves began to tighten up in the old familiar way.

He was right beside the ambulance when it careened to a stop by the sump on the windward side of the Grizzly Two fire. A man came running and shouting at the driver.

"Nothing yet! We haven't got him out! He's still pinned under the go-devil, and young Chase is going in right now!"

Buck hit the ground running. He slammed his way through the crowd by the tool-shed and thrust inside, kicking the door shut after him.

Ken Chase was driving his long thin legs into a pair of asbestos pants, and Katherine was working furiously over the wrinkled folds of the jacket.

"Give me those!" Buck Malloy said, and grabbed the pants from Ken's hand.

Katherine cried, "You—" her voice thin with shock.

"Who's in there? Rock Tenney?"

"Of course," Ken said, and then yelled as he came out of his surprise: "Hey, give me those! What the—"

"Shut up!" Buck snarled. "What the hell do you know about heat?"

Katherine cried, "If you think we want—" But Ken drowned her out with a roar as he rushed Buck Malloy.

Buck was expecting that, and he shifted his feet as his right shoulder went down. He waited coldly until the boy started his swing, then went in under it with one wicked, driving punch. Ken's knees went limp as Buck caught him under the arms so that his face wouldn't strike the floor when he went down.

He heard Katherine's cry, and swung around to hold both her shoulders in his big hands.

"Shut up and listen! That kid's too young and frail for the heat in there. He couldn't lift the weight of the steel, and he'd just die trying. Now will you help me get into this thing?"

FOR an instant there was a wild defiance in the girl's eyes; then it was swept away in a blaze of something else, something that Buck didn't quite understand or dare believe. She said through stiff lips:

"Yes, I'll help."

Neither of them spoke again in the moments that it took to strap the huge suit on; but just before he slipped the helmet over his head, Buck said flatly:

"When that kid comes to, you can tell him that I was hauled out of that fire in Tulsa!"

Katherine said softly, "I guess I never really thought you abandoned Dad, Buck," and opened the door for him.

Buck yanked the head-case on and got the oxygen-bit in his teeth. Somebody passed him a crowbar, and he started down into the pit.

Of all the fires that Buck had gone in under, the Grizzly Two was the toughest. He was knee-deep in water and sludge before he was halfway across the sump, and there was more ground heat than he'd ever seen.

The well was blowing up through the muck from a submerged casing, spitting raw, flaming crude out for fifty feet in every direction. By the time he reached his objective, his whole suit was black and the glass window before his eyes was giving him only outlines.

By feel rather than sight, he found what had happened. The sump's bottom had cracked away under the weight of the ponderous go-devil, and its sinking left end had caught and pinned both of Rock Tenney's legs.

He couldn't tell if the man were still alive or not, but there was a chance if he hadn't lost his oxygen-feeder, for he was almost wholly under the surface, and the muck gave some shelter from the heat.

Buck dropped the crowbar twice from his clumsy, heat-numbered hands before he got it angled in under the steel. He could feel the murderous scorch of fire across his shoulders as he humped his back and set himself to heave.

In the first moment of trying, the bogged go-devil didn't budge at all. He took more oxygen and tried again. That time he lifted it a few inches, but was unable to hold it while he made a try at working Rock Tenney free. When he let go, it dropped back into place again, and the pain in his bad hip was agonizing. He knew he was beaten—unless he could find a block.

There was only one thing he could use. If he could find the valve that Rock had been trying to set, he might have a chance. Moving on his hands and knees, his chest dragging through the blistering surface, he started toward the center of the raging pit. When he found the collar at last, the footing was too bad to stand, and he had to roll it back, pushing it before him a foot at a time.

Buck never knew just how he got it there and shoved in under the frame, but he did it; then he forced his agonized flesh into the killing feat of lifting Rock Tenney to his back.

Oil and flame had smeared his helmet to make him totally blind by then, and there was nothing but instinct and the roar of the fire to guide his steps, but somehow he made the rim of the sump, where ready hands hauled him up.

BUCK had some knowledge of distant cheering as he passed out; but when he came to, there was just the glorious cool of hospital sheets, and the gentle touch of Katherine's fingers on his hair.

He tried to smile with a face that was blistered and swollen. It hurt too much, so he gave it up, but he managed to say: "Rock?"

"Yes, dear," the girl said. "Rock will live. Now you be still and rest." She bent to touch the hot misery of his lips with her own.

THE ancient fable of the Fountain of Youth forms the basis of this dramatic story—the sixth in the much-discussed series “Trumpets from Oblivion.”

Illustrated by
R. L. Lambdin



Five Miles to Youth

By H. BEDFORD-JONES

TRUMPETS from oblivion! What on earth does that mean?"

"Glimpses from the past, messages from departed ages," I said, trying to explain the phrase to Viola Conway, our visiting celebrity. She was a wary, determined young woman lawyer, specializing in patent rights, who was addressing our Inventors Club on the subject. "You've heard of Norman Fletcher?"

"Mercy! *The* Norman Fletcher? The electrical wizard? Does he belong to your club?"

"No," I said. "But the laboratories that the Pan-American Electric Corporation built for him are just outside the city. He's been demonstrating some of his discoveries with high-frequency and ultrasonic waves. He can bring back scenes from the past."

"I don't believe it," she said flatly.

"Neither do I; but he does it, Miss Conway. Trumpets from Oblivion, he calls them. He's been working on myths and legends, showing how they originated in past ages."

"Wait! Let me get it straight. He actually brings back scenes and voices?"

"Yes; but the voices have to be translated and dubbed in, somehow. He says it's not television; that's the only thing

I can compare it all to. For example, tonight he's going to show some of us, after your lecture, how the Fountain of Youth idea originated. You see, he claims that all the myths and legends of mankind are founded somehow on fact."

"Tonight? A real Fountain of Youth?" she exclaimed. "I'm going with you. Arrange it, please. I must go!"

I demurred hastily. Some of Norman Fletcher's demonstrations were a bit on the strong side, even for a woman lawyer. But Viola Conway set her jaw and had her way.

That's how she came to walk in with us, that evening, when we assembled at the huge granite structure that was Fletcher's home and personal laboratory. Fletcher, charming old Yankee that he was, made her welcome; his white-haired, powerful features gave no indication of the dismay he must have felt, for he seldom admitted women to the place. I fancy he regretted the open leave he had given me to bring any guests I liked.

Viola Conway took hold; she was that kind. She gave no one else a chance. She talked a blue streak all the way into the gaunt, stone-walled laboratory. When we took our easy chairs and cigars, she hauled out some Turkish cigarettes and kept on talking; she had a line of chatter



that got on one's nerves. Finally I gave her a nudge and gesture, and she shut up.

Our chairs were set facing a perfectly blank, solid stone wall. There was no apparatus that we could see. Fletcher sat at his controls; the outfit looked like an old-fashioned melodeon, had no apparent wires or connections with anything; yet when he touched a switch the lights in the room dimmed.

"Takes a little time for the tubes to warm," he said genially. "You know, it's a very odd thing about the subject before us tonight, the Fountain of Youth, in that it takes us back to very definite persons and times."

"I don't see how you can expect to get any origin for that legend," said some one. "It's a craving of the human heart, really, that goes back to the first man."

Fletcher rumbled up his white hair and laughed. "Or the first woman! True. But remember, we're dealing here with a very definite legend, even with maps and guides; a supposed fact that set the whole world afire four hundred years ago and caused explorations which very largely opened up the world's knowledge of America. That's our subject—the actual Fountain of Youth!"

"Oh! Then there really was one!" chirped Viola Conway.

Fletcher bent a cautious eye upon her.

"I didn't say that, Miss Conway. The story is very curious; I've had the Spanish put into English, so you'll hear English words spoken. Ponce de Leon, you'll remember, got the story and the map when he was in Porto Rico; although he was sixty, he set out with three ships. Later, he brought over a colony from Spain—"

"Oh, I know that name! He discovered Florida!" exclaimed Viola Conway.

I nudged her more violently.

"Watch the wall!" I said in her ear. "And for heaven's sake, keep your trap shut."

She colored, gave me a furious look; but before she could speak her mind, she caught sight of the light playing on the stone wall. And after that, she just forgot all about me or what she had to say.

Even to me, who had seen it many times, the miracle of that light was fresh and astonishing past belief. It gathered from nowhere on the solid stone wall, and it dissolved the stone before our eyes; and then it continued. We saw through that granite wall as through a window, but not into the outside darkness—rather, we continued with the light, and

there before us were waving trees and sunlight, and a gaunt gray man with fanatic eyes and a stiff jaw under his ragged gray beard—and facing him was a girl.

AN old man, straight as a ramrod, stalwart, uncompromising and terrible; he wore steel breastplate and back-piece, was girded with a long sword, and looked as though he could use it. The girl spoke, with a defiant flash of her eyes.

"Think twice, Ponce de Leon!" she said, deep in her lovely throat. "*Adelantado* you may be, governor of all these lands, ruler of Florida and Bimini for the King; but I am no common street wench to be given like a Carib slave to any of your colonists. I came out from Spain to marry Don Diego de Sotomayor; and I have changed my mind; and that's the flat of it."

"I think there is a devil in you," said old Leon with a growl. "You charm and you defy, Estrella of San Jacinto! You make light of all laws and bargains. You agree to marry a man, then throw him over when you see him, and set your heart upon another. Because you come of good family, you defy me. But take care! Greater than you have gone back from the New World to Spain in heavy chains."

The girl laughed lightly. "Why not meet me halfway, Don Ponce? Look. I did not know Don Diego was a cruel and somber tyrant, wasted by years of debauchery, accustomed to treat women as he does his Indian slaves! No. Instead, look at the scholar Christoval, compare him—"

"Peace, rebellious tongue!" old Ponce de Leon suddenly burst forth in anger. "Go to your quarters, attend to your work, let this matter await later judgment! And keep your mouth shut. Make any more trouble for honest men, and I swear by the nails of God, I'll pack you off in chains by the next ship!"

When the old *conquistador* used that oath, he meant business.

"Very well," said Estrella. "If by honest men you mean your old comrade Don Diego, tell him to keep his tongue and his hands off me, or I'll put a dagger into his swollen midriff! I obey, Your Excellency; meekly and humbly I obey Your Gracious Majesty."

With light and mocking words she departed, a neat baggage, a glorious gaudy baggage, all high spirit and red cheeks and black passionate eyes; a baggage filled with fire and laughter and eager-

ness, who feared no one and made the fact evident.

Leon sank back into his seat beneath the stretched canvas sunshade, swore most heartily, and beckoned a slave to bring him drink. Others approached; officers and assistants, traders, builders. With an effort, he flung himself into the work again.

Here in the bright Florida sunlight, his colony had come to earth. The ships lay anchored, and their lading was coming ashore. Hasty dwellings were being erected; the lines of a fort were traced; a camp was formed; and the royal flag of Spain waved from a stripped tree.

Nearly thirty years had passed, since the New World had been opened up; they had been years of continual conquest, of blood and tears and gold; and it was nearly ten years since Ponce de Leon, governor of Porto Rico, left his hard-won repose, donned his armor, and set forth to find the land of promise and perpetual youth. Now he had located it, he had brought a fleet to conquer and colonize it, and the magic waters of the fountain were being searched out and tracked down. For, unhappily, the actual fountain itself was elusive.

But getting a colony established in a subtropical forest land, where the Indians were bitterly hostile, was difficult. So the old *adelantado* found it. Even the bright mail of Spain, and the arquebus and cannon, helped but little.

THE afternoon sun wore on; the details ironed themselves out, and presently came Don Diego de Sotomayor, a vivid man, though somewhat burned out by his vices, which were many. He had a cruel eye and a cruel mouth and a tongue touched with gall; but he and the chief were old comrades, *conquistadores* of the ancient breed. Leon gave up business for the day, sent some of the many Carib slaves for wine, and sat with his friend in the tent that served until a headquarters house was built. On the morrow, Sotomayor was going in search of the blessed fountain, which could not be far away.

"I've picked the best fifty men, but even the best is staggering with scurvy," said Don Diego, warmed by the good Xeres wine. "Ten arquebuses, twenty crossbows, as many pikes. And ten Caribs to scout the forests. Provisions for three days."

"Well done," approved Leon. "We know it's close; due north of Cuba, by

the map, and this is the spot. The Indians have told of it."

"You're hopeful," growled the other. "I'm not. Remember, when Ortubia found the Isle of Bimini, his men were like mad, bathing in every spring. This island of Florida may bring the same ill luck. Besides, that damned university scholar you brought along for secretary has been hinting the search is useless. The men are discouraged."

"Eh? Christoval?" The bushy gray brows of Leon masked angry eyes. "*Por Dios!* This passes all bounds, Diego!"

"I think so myself; but he's your man, not mine. What luck with Estrella?"

"Impudence." Old Leon sighed. "She's all fire, Diego; it might be better to set your eye on a kindlier wench. That is, unless you find the fountain."

"IN which case,"—and Sotomayor laughed,—“you and I will be giving the young fellows a long start and then raising new families, eh? No, no; I hold the lass to her bargain. It's my right, and I demand it.”

"You shall have her," said Leon. "Look you! I've brought all the books from Spain that deal with the matter—Vespucci, Pedro Martyr, and the rest. Maps as well. I've set Christoval to drawing up an accurate brief covering the whole question of the fountain of youth. He'll be finished in another day or so. Then I'll clap him into chains and send him back to Cuba with the ships."

"Good. The Caribs report Indians all about. Any use to conciliate them?"

"Those heathen? Kill them on sight," said Ponce de Leon with disdain. "Capture a few women if you can; make them talk. Send me back word with a guide in two days, and I'll move out to support you—eh?"

"Not bad. It'll give more time for the search. And it might not be bad to bring the lass Estrella along. Easier to break her will, out in the forest," said Sotomayor callously. "Too many people here around the camp. We might settle things more readily with your secretary, as well. Bring him. Why waste good chains on the rascal?"

The two grinned one at another.

"But mind this," Leon said earnestly, pawing his ragged beard. "Mind, Diego! Don't take any advantage. When you find the spring, send a messenger at once. You might take a plunge yourself, just one to try it; but keep the men out of the water."

"Right," said the other. "Why not move up your headquarters as soon as I find the spot? Place the colony there and use this as a base of operations."

"An admirable idea, Diego! It'll take care of our difficulty with those two, the lass and Christoval, also. You're taking along that Indian woman who claims to know just where the fountain is?"

"Naturally; she's kept chained day and night. Bimini—she recognized the name at once, remember?" Sotomayor's cruel eyes gleamed avidly. "Ah, Ponce, we have it, we have it! I feel that we're close upon it this time!"

"I'm certain of it, comrade." With the wine, with rising hopes, old Leon flushed eagerly. The two of them, worn and wasted by illness and debauchery far beyond their age, thinned by hurts in savage battle, pushed to shadows of men by tropical ardors and disease and dissipated energies, flamed up to the thoughts that mounted in their brains.

"Think of it, man!" cried the *adelantado*. "Ten years off at one dip, they say! We have reports from Indians who have seen the effects!"

"Aye, but perhaps they were talking to please us, as their habit is," Sotomayor rejoined. "However, this time there's no doubt we're hard upon it. I'll send you back good news, as soon as we strike any!"

Leon lifted his winecup. "Think of it—to be twenty again, with our brains, our knowledge of the world, our experience! Here's luck to you, comrade!"

The flagons clinked; the sun went down upon the Florida swamps; and the voices of the outflung guards and Carib allies reported all well.

ALL well indeed, and better than well, for next afternoon came back a messenger from the column with word that caused wide rejoicing. A large Indian village located and burned, the naked savages cut down, their women and children captured in part, with all hell let loose upon the red heathen. More, the fountain of Bimini was reported five miles farther on, five miles at the most! The location was sure and certain this time. Five miles to youth!

Through all the camp and the ships ran a flame that night, an ardent, blazing madness that coruscated in every brain and kindled every tongue. The famed spring of Indian legend, Bimini! The fount of eternal youth itself! Those who had book-learning repeated the words of

Pedro Martyr—*fonte perenni*—to the others. Here was the island written about, reported, mapped; found at last! Here was the island so long sought; for there was no doubt that Florida was the island mapped north of Cuba.

The credulous, tottering sick men, half dead with scurvy, went wild as the stories passed around. No wonder was too great to come out of this New World, the home of all wonders. Sickness ended, age wiped away, the tales of Indians proven true; health, youth, gold for all! Fires blazed; cannon thundered; lilting Spanish songs and drunken voices drifted across the water.

TWO of that ecstatic company alone remained untouched by the contagion.

They had met among the palmettos behind the foundations of the new fort. They stood in the starlight, hand in hand. Estrella de San Jacinto, all mental bars down, voiced the anxious, fear-inspired thought that she would have denied by proud daylight.

"Christoval, what's to become of us? It's all hopeless, so hopeless! I've kept a brave front, but it's no use. Here in this savage land we can't run away, we have no refuge. Yet we can't face the power that will destroy us. Ponce de Leon is governor; Don Diego is royal commissioner; they're both merciless, hard as iron."

"So will I be, if needs must," said the young man, his voice low and deep, his thoughtful features composed. "Little Star, take heart! I have one bold stroke to play, but I can't see, yet how it will help us. Never mind what it is—trust me to find a way, some way."

"Ah, Christoval, stop dreaming!" she said sadly. "For you, chains and death; for me, a living death in some Cuban convent. Can't you see it?"

"Clearly, my love," he assented. "Two evil old men, bitter of heart, who between them rule our little world. The old can be so terrible! Ponce de Leon, the *adelantado*, I can strike to the heart, I can wound where the hurt will go deepest; Sotomayor, his evil genius, remains. To him I must find a way, by help of destiny."

She stared at him in the starlight, so young, so grave, so confident.

"How can you be calm, Christoval?"

"Because, Little Star, I love you, and must win you. Sotomayor, the soldier! Well, perhaps I must meet him on that ground; I, the despised student, the



scholar of Salamanca, may yet surprise him. With those two old men cleared from our path, who remains?"

"Here, you mean? In charge of the colony? Oh!" She started suddenly. "You mean Don Juan Castelzar! Your friend—"

"Who remains in charge of the ships." Christoval jerked his head toward the lights of the galleons. "He can't help us now; he could if he were ashore. He, the second in command now, might be all-powerful if Leon and Sotomayor were removed."

"What do you plan?" She came close to him, her voice filled with alarm, with anxiety. "No, no, Christoval! You can't mean—murder! I love you for what you are, my dear; because you're better, finer than all the rest. Don't talk of murder. Don't bring yourself down to that level. We could never enjoy life if—"

He laughed and drew her to him, joyously.

"Silly! I'm not talking of murder. Sotomayor—well, it may come to killing there. Not to murder, I swear it! But we're fighting for life, and more than life; remember that, Little Star. The odds are heavy, but we'll best them."

They clung together, wordless, mute in the despair of love that had scant hope.

A sound of voices roused them, startled them. Christoval drew away.

"They're calling me—the governor must want me. Farewell!"

A last kiss, and he hurried away.

IT was as he thought; Ponce de Leon had sent for him, and he hastened to the headquarters tent. The *adelantado*, shaking and yellowed with fever, was sitting at the table and eyed him grimly.

"Ha, Christoval! Finished with the brief, yet?"

"Just finished, Excellency."

"Good. I'll inspect it tomorrow. Now, sit, and write. Orders and requisitions."

Christoval sat, trimmed a quill, and looked at the gaunt aquiline features, so ridden by illness.

"Excellency," he protested gently, "can the orders not wait until morning?"

"No. Tomorrow we must march to meet Don Diego, leave the work here to be finished later, and establish main headquarters farther on. First, requisitions to be set ashore in the morning from the ships by Don Juan Castelzar."

The secretary wrote. With meticulous attention to detail, Leon forced himself

to cover every point, his iron will surmounting all physical handicap and suffering. The long-sought spring had been found, and he himself was pushing inland to join Sotomayor and establish headquarters there, as a spearhead for the colony which would push back the savages and make this coastal base secure.

Christoval wrote on, his features giving no hint of the pity, fury and awful futility that warred in his mind. Twice he started to speak, but forced back the words; it was not time. He knew more about this fountain of youth than did the old governor; in fact, he knew all.

BUT Leon forged on with burning zeal, a fervent enthusiasm fed by fever. He listed those who were to accompany him; he named Estrella and other women of the company. Christoval looked up from his paper, wide-eyed.

"But—your Excellency! Women, on such an expedition—"

"Silence, fool! We move headquarters to the wondrous spring. Don Diego has put all the heathen to flight. On with your work!"

Christoval compressed his lips and obeyed. At length it was done, the orders and requisitions signed by the trembling fingers of the old governor.

"If it please you, Excellency," said Christoval, "I have made certain discoveries in regard to the fountain of youth which should come to your attention."

"Tomorrow." Leon relaxed and stifled a groan. "I can do no more tonight; I must sleep. Tomorrow, before we march. And you march with us!" . . .

Morning rose with alarm. Two sentries attacked, wounded by arrows. The Carib scouts were sent out, and alarm died; a few vagrant redskins, no more, who refused fight.

The *adelantado* was an organizer. The brief alarm over and scouts sent out, he retired to his tent and sent for his secretary. Under his lieutenants, packs were being made up and the details of the march were moving like clockwork. Soon the advance would be under way.

Christoval, laden with books and documents, came into the big tent, and Leon sent out everyone else.

"Your brief, your memoir on the *fonte perenni*?"

"It is here, Excellency."

"Last night, you spoke of certain discoveries. They are written down?"

"They are for verbal report to you alone."

Ponce de Leon eyed the younger man with bitter searching gaze and frowned at the calm, resolute features fronting him. Victim as he was of wild credulous dreams and hopes, such masterful youth as this irritated him to the quick, reminding him of all he had lost and was seeking so determinedly to regain.

"More wild rumors, I suppose, such as the Indians tell?"

"No, Excellency. Definite fact this time, and thoroughly documented."

"What?" A tinge of color rose in the gray cheeks. "Then we must have it at once! You have the writings of Pedro Martyr there? And the map that goes with them, showing the island and fountain? There's definite location; are your discoveries as certain?"

"Even more certain, Excellency."

The old man warmed. "And you stand there unmoved—bah! What are you made of, that the greatest wonder in the world leaves you so calm? But I forgot. You're in love, or think you are. Well, if you've spoken the truth, it may save you from the punishment you merit for sowing dissension among the men. Prove your words!"

CHRISTOVAL took the opposite stool, rid himself of the papers and books, and opened the latter to marked pages. He did not share the eagerness of his chief; he was coldly inflexible, assured.

"Very well, Excellency. You are aware that nearly thirty years ago, in 1493, the Pope assigned these newly discovered lands to Spain, on condition that the natives be baptized?"

"Are you speaking to a fool?" snapped Leon. "Of course I know it."

"Here,"—and Christoval displayed one of his texts,—"*is the work of Amerigo Vespucci. He reports that in compliance with the will of His Holiness, a font for baptism had been established on an island in the Gulf of Mexico.*"

"I know, I know," said the governor, frowning. "A false report—rather, made in error. We've been too busy killing the heathen to start baptizing them as yet."

"Quite true." And the secretary smiled thinly. He was on tremendous tension, knowing full well what he was about and what it would mean, but giving no indication of his strung nerves. "However, the statement of Vespucci is an important link in the chain of evi-

dence that I'm about to reveal. A most important link. You'll notice that he uses the word '*fonte*' in speaking of the font for baptism."

"Certainly, certainly," said Leon with some asperity. "What other word would he use? Do you call this a discovery?"

"I'm coming to it, Excellency. Now, here is the work of Pedro Martyr, the '*Decade of 1511.*' He does not mention the Fountain of Youth—"

"But," declared the governor excitedly, "it is the map in his work which does mention it by name, which shows it here! The Isle of Bimini!"

"Precisely; in his exact words, '*isla de beimeni parte.*' Or, to use the original Latin again, '*fonte perenni.*' Pedro Martyr speaks of this baptismal spring or fountain. His cartographer misread the Latin, misunderstood it completely, and imagined that the '*perennial fonte*' meant the Fountain of Youth. It is quite clear from the text—"

"But Pedro Martyr speaks definitely of the Fountain of Youth!" exclaimed the old *adelantado*. "Look! Here is the passage—here—"

His voice died, and he swallowed hard.

"Precisely; there it is," said Christoval. "Merely repeating the words of Amerigo Vespucci. Not an eternal fountain of life; but a perennial or fixed, established spring for the baptism of savages. You and others have never carefully dissected these texts. You have jumped at hasty conclusions, perhaps from ignorance of Latin, just as did the man who made the map."

PONCE DE LEON stared, his deep-set eyes outraged, rebellious, dismayed.

"But," he cried angrily, "if what you say were true, then there is no mention at all of the Fountain of Youth!"

"Exactly the case; such a place exists only in the imagination," Christoval replied steadily, inflexibly. "In effect, there is no Fountain of Youth at all, Excellency, except in the legends of Indians. The Spanish word '*beimeni*' on the map refers to washing, to baptism; it has nothing to do with the legendary name of Bimini—"

"Impossible! You are utterly mad!" burst forth Ponce de Leon, the veins standing out on his forehead, his face gray and terrible.

"Not at all," said Christoval calmly. "You certainly know enough Latin to see for yourself that I'm right. If not, call in Fray Hernan to translate this for



Don Diego found himself fighting for his very life.

you. Through the absurd mistake of supposing that '*fonte perenni*' refers to some fountain of eternal youth, arose this whole wild and fantastic legend. When the Indians are questioned about it, they endeavor to please you—"

"A lie! A damned outrageous lie! There's no truth in anything you say!" screamed out the *adelantado* hoarsely. An access of fury shook him; for a moment he seemed on the verge of apoplexy. Then, with a smothered groan, he sank back into his chair, drawing the map

and book with him and staring at it with distended eyes.

After all, delusion and credulity aside, Ponce de Leon had a whiplike brain, a sure grasp of detail; in a word, intelligence. The awful realization of years wasted on a fool's errand, thanks to this map, and hastily assimilated Latin, and the tales of Indians, smote him to the very quick; he struggled against it, but it grew upon him none the less.

Christoval could read how it grew, in that gray and tortured face, seared with



Outside, a cry rose:
"Los Indios!"

evil torment, with the sudden crash of avid, longing hopes and dreams before the hard touch of reality. Upon this insecure foundation had been erected, not only the frantic hopes of that old heart, but a physical structure—these ships, this colony, this grant from the king of the lands here, title and honors!

A deeper and more terrible groan shook the man. Abruptly he was years older.

Then his head jerked up. A flood of passionate color ran through his cheeks; his eyes bit into the secretary with blazing rage. He came up out of his chair.

"You accursed scoundrel!" he spat out. "You, at least, shall tell no one else

this fantastic story! No one would believe it—"

He stiffened, listening, and swung around. Christoval, startled, turned and glanced through the opening of the raised flap, at the clearing.

A swift and growing outbreak of voices was heard; a Carib yelled, then another. A woman screamed. Movement of men, morions and breastplates flashing in the sunlight. An arquebus exploded, then a second, and the entire camp was in writhing turmoil. A soldier came running, feet pounding the sand hard, and panted into the tent, his face ashen, his eyes wide with dismay.

"Excellency! It is Don Diego de Sotomayor!"

"Where? What?" demanded Leon. "A messenger?"

"He himself, with half a dozen men. No more. *Los Indios!* Indians by the hundred in the forest, everywhere—there! Look!"

THE incredible sight was plain—Sotomayor indeed, sword in hand, bare of head, armor splashed with blood and mud; behind him, half a dozen staggering men with arquebuses, most of them bandaged and hurt. No more. The men sank down. Don Diego came striding across the clearing, indomitable, iron-hard, defiant of all the world.

Hurriedly, Ponce de Leon poured wine and extended the cup. Don Diego seized it, emptied it, grunted hoarsely.

"What does it mean?" demanded the governor. "What has happened? Where are your men?"

"Dead," said Don Diego. "They attacked us last night. We cut through them. Men dropped all the time. We came on. More died. We are here—what's left of us. And the savages are upon you by the hundred!"

Ponce de Leon gripped at him. "But—but—the spring—"

"Water like all other water. The stories all a vast lie, Ponce. A lie!"

The governor stepped back, his face ghastly. "God forgive me! Yes, I know it now. Christoval showed me—a horrible mistake. The text misread, misunderstood—there is no Fountain of Youth, Diego. All a lie."

He slumped for a moment. Then more shots roused him—shots, yells, wild shouts, the resounding twang of loosed crossbows, frantic calls of alarm, calls for the governor. Attack! Attack on all sides—arrows in the air, Spaniards

dying there in the clearing, a rift of powder-smoke as more guns were loosed.

Then indeed old Leon awoke, caught up his sword, and was gone at a run. Don Diego stepped to the table, poured more wine, and swigged it. His eyes fell upon the forgotten secretary. A tide of passionate fury leaped into his eyes.

"You!" he rasped out, with an oath. "You damned dog of a clerk, a scholar, who dared to obstruct me! You accursed rascal, who have spread stories among the men, who have fed Ponce your damned lies and broken him—by the saints, he looked like a man in the torments of hell! And all because of you."

Christoval smiled easily, but his eyes were very alert and quick.

"You seem disappointed, good Señor Don; youth has eluded you, and love, and victory," he said with edged words that drove deep home. All the while the noise of battle grew more furious outside. Men were working around the one cannon that had been landed and mounted; trumpets were blowing; Indian yells were ringing.

"But," went on Christoval in his calm way, "that should not drive you to rage. After all, you're lucky to be alive, at your age. You have seen your thousands die under whips and torments; the Indian slaves granted you for their well-being have been worked to death. And now, what? Is there anything so terrible as evil old men like you and Don Ponce—except it be futile old men?"

DON DIEGO bit his lip savagely. He fairly trembled with acute fury.

"You dog! Do you dare to jeer at me?"

"Ah! I am not a *rico hombre* or a great man," said the secretary, "but at least I am a gentleman of good blood, and I wear a sword. That, I think, was all you started with when you came to the New World, Don Diego. And it is all you're ending with as well."

"You'll not see the ending," gasped Sotomayor.

Swift as light, he moved with his naked blade—moved swift and sharp and cruelly, so that the rapid lunge was unexpected as death itself. Wary and alert as he was, the secretary could not quite evade. As he writhed aside, the point of the blade slashed at his chest but missed his throat.

A step, two steps, and he swung around to meet the intent and lustful rush of Don Diego, this time his own sword out

and ready. Outside, the cannon roared, an arquebus volley echoed the roar feebly. Don Diego, pushing his rabid attack, cursed in hearty surprise as the blades clashed and slithered, as the calm features of Christoval leaped into flushed anger, as the younger man beat him back and back until he found himself at bay against the tent wall, fighting for his very life. Then outside—

"*Los Indios! Los Indios!*" a cry rose.

A FEARFUL panic cry, a medley of screams and women's voices close at hand. The two men separated, glanced aside. Across the open flitted naked savage figures—they had poured in upon the defenses from the rear. Women's voices again; with a hot shout of alarm, Christoval leaped away and was gone.

Don Diego panted after him, halted, saw a swirl of figures at one side. The redskins were being stormed and flung back, outside the camp lines. With the old battle-cry of "*Santiago!*" Don Diego charged for the spot where the *adelantado* and half a dozen men were knotted against a savage press.

He struck no blow. As he came up, the cannon roared again, the crossbow bolts whirled and clanged. The naked throng, riddled with death, broke and fled. From the moss-hung trees, from the palmettos, a rain of farewell shafts poured at the clearing.

"Jesu! Maria!" gasped Don Diego, as one, then another, smote him—and he died at the feet of his old comrade.

A gray shadow of a man, Ponce de Leon straightened up, took two steps, and the men running to him caught him as he staggered. A feathered shaft protruded from his side.

"Tell—Don Juan—command—take command—" he faltered, and went down.

They carried him into his tent, and the shaft was cut out. The wound was not mortal, but something more than mere blood had gone out of that gaunt iron *conquistador*. Hope had gone, and the will to live, with his lost belief in the Fountain of Youth. When they carried him aboard ship and set sail for Cuba, he neither moved nor spoke nor cared, but lay with closed eyes and gray waxen features and stricken soul, as the pennons of Spain retreated. . . .

The light upon the stone wall faded out, and the stones of granite grew solid once more; Norman Fletcher touched a switch, and the room lights flashed on.

Stroking back his white hair, our host picked up his cigar and turned to us with his genial smile. The smile died, as the yawp of Viola Conway broke the silence.

"Oh, I think it's wonderful!" she broke out. "Whatever it is, Mr. Fletcher, it's wonderful! But tell me quickly—what became of that young man and the pretty Spanish girl? It was all their story, wasn't it?"

"No, it was not," said Fletcher.

"But what became of them?"

"You know as much as I do," he rejoined. "Presumably, they married and lived happily ever after."

"Oh, but I wanted so much to make sure of it!" she rejoined, blissfully ignoring his sarcasm and the helpless looks the rest of us were exchanging. "And was what he said the real story of the mistake? Wasn't there any Fountain of Youth after all?"

Fletcher gave me one murderous look, and I knew that if I ever again brought a female to his laboratory, something would happen to me. But he regained his composure.

"No, Miss Conway, there was not," he said affably. "You've heard how the story actually arose, put in words of one syllable; there's more to it, but to crystallize the growth of a legend in a few words is rather difficult."

"I see," she rejoined vaguely. And then she did a frightful thing, quite innocently; but innocence is no excuse.

"There were some striking lines, and one in particular," she chattered breezily on. "Especially that one about old men. Is there anything more terrible than old men? No, that wasn't it. What was it he said? Oh, yes! I remember. The old can be so terrible! That's true, frightfully true, isn't it? The old can be so terrible!"

IT was a tribute to Norman Fletcher, of course, that she never thought of him, never realized that he was actually an old man, as she gushed out the question.

He gave her one glance, and then beamed. His eyes twinkled, and with the greatest kindness and courtesy he let her have both barrels.

"Well, Miss Conway, I don't know, to tell the truth. Perhaps you will, some day."

And she never got it until, when we were halfway back to the city, I heard her give a gasp of indignant realization.

Next month: a Viking legend provides material for a poignant and memorable story.

The BLACKOUT

KIRD CAREY watched Jane arranging the papers on the publisher's desk in the corner of the library and decided everyone was a liar. Jane wasn't that sort. Still, it was common knowledge. Everyone claimed she was more than Edgerlane's secretary; it was known that the publisher took orders from Jane, and that certainly proved something. But everyone was crazy, in Kird's opinion. And the first time he heard one of those very clever remarks, some one was going to collect a punch in the nose. . . .

She had finished at the desk and had started to change the ribbon in her typewriter.

"Need any help?" asked Kird.

"No, thanks."

"You'll get your hands dirty."

"No, I won't."

She was using a penknife to untangle the snarl, and Kird waited until she had almost nipped her finger. Then he walked across the library, pushed her hands away from the machine and started to pull the ribbon free. Jane pricked the back of his hand with the knife-point.

Kird said: "Hey—what's the idea?"

Jane went to work on the ribbon again, and Kird decided to box the ear nearest to him. Then he decided not to.

"What's the idea?" he asked again.

"I don't like your methods. Too direct," replied Jane briefly.

Kird grinned—a nice grin. He was six feet two, wide across the shoulders, and his hands were large. News-photographers usually tried to catch one of those hands doubled a few inches from the nose of a reluctant witness. He was a natural for court reporters—a fast-thinking lawyer who had made it the hard way. He'd studied law while a member of the famous Gangster Squad of the New York Police Department, gone into practice, and attracted the attention of Waldo Edgerlane, owner of a country-wide chain of newspapers. Now Kird was Special Prosecuting Attorney, appointed by the Governor to clean up the rackets. Not bad for a man still in his early thirties!

"Do you always stick knives into people you don't agree with?" he asked.

"If they need it."

"Do I?"

"Certainly," said Jane. "That conviction you got today was nothing less than a compromise. Chuck Deverant was guilty of murder. You tried him on a second-degree charge to be sure you'd win."

"That's right, Jane."

"Well, I don't like compromises. Deverant will be out in five years to go on with his killing."

"No, he won't," said Kird. "He's going to a jail where the Black Alley crowd is serving time. He framed them, you know, and took over their territory." Kird lifted a cigarette from a jade box on the desk, lit it and grinned again at Jane. "Better fill that box. It's empty."

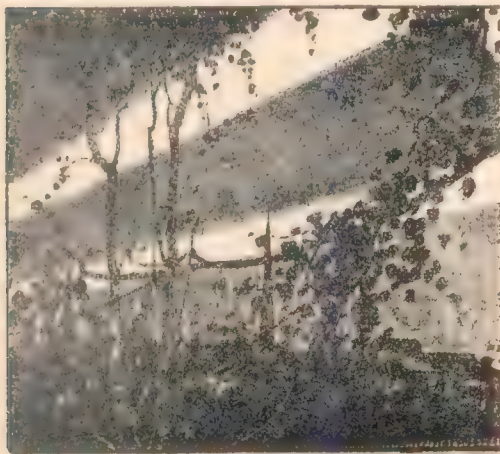
"Never mind the box," said Jane. "Do you think the Black Alley gang will try to get even with Deverant in jail?"

"I wouldn't be a bit surprised."

"Kill him?"

"That's the usual custom."

Jane finished inserting the ribbon and pushed the typewriter on its portable



A FASCINATING detective novel, complete in this issue, by a gifted writer new to these pages—the author of "Pay to Learn."



stand to a corner of the library. She set a black lacquer screen before it and walked to the big desk.

"I don't like it," she said quietly. "And I can't understand why Mr. Edgerlane puts much confidence in a man who would do such a thing."

"But you like me, don't you, Jane?"

Jane looked at him quizzically, then walked slowly around him as though she were inspecting a dress model. When she faced him again there was a slight tuck at the corner of her mouth.

"Good-looking and conceited. Too bad they always go together."

THE library door opened and Waldo Edgerlane came into the room. He was tall and stooped, with a mass of white hair that was brushed and combed but never in order. It made him look like an old lion, and this fitted his reputation, for he followed one rule. "If it's right, I'm for it. If it's wrong, I'm ag'in' it." He'd been fighting Communism, Fascism, and every "ism" except Americanism, and therefore was called a flag-waver.

He patted Jane on the cheek, and took the letters she had opened for him to read.

"Sorry to be late, Kird," he said. "Make yourself comfortable and tell me how the day went."

"He'll enjoy that," said Jane quickly. "He's just arranged to have Deverant murdered in jail."

"That's an exaggeration, Jane," said Kird. "I merely—"

"I've heard all about it," said Edgerlane. He smiled and glanced at his mail. "I don't think Deverant will be greatly mourned when his time comes. Narcotics and women were his rackets, weren't they, Kird?"

"Yes sir. An occasional murder on the side if necessary."

The publisher nodded. "Good riddance; but I wish we could find the man he works for."

"Are you still sure there is such a man?" asked Kird. "Must all of these rackets stem from a single head?"

"They do," said Edgerlane: "numbers, policy, narcotics, slot-machines—a quick way to make money for a man with a dream. A big man, Kird—so big that he dreams of one day becoming dictator of America."

"You've said that before, sir," said Kird. "But frankly, it sounds fantastic. When you try to reason the thing out, it simply won't add up."

"Why not?" asked Jane. "Have you anything to disprove it?"

Kird smiled. "Let's put it the other way—have you anything to prove it?"

It was Edgerlane's turn to smile. He winked at Jane. "Careful, Jane. He's good at questions."

"I've noticed that," said Jane. "But he's not so fast with the answers."

"Wrong again," said Kird. He glanced at his watch. "It's nine o'clock—ask me the name of the political boss who has just been arrested and charged with bribery, assault, accessory before and after the fact in a dozen shootings, and a few other crimes."

Edgerlane's eyes came alive. "A political boss?" he asked. "How big?"

"He runs half the city."

"And you've had him arrested?"



By **BORDEN
CHASE**

"Yes—left orders to pick him up at nine."

"Who is it, Kird?" asked Edgerlane.

"Jimmy Hensdrel. And I'm going to send him away for at least five years."

"Hensdrel—Jimmy Hensdrel?" cried Edgerlane. "You've picked up *Jimmy Hensdrel*?"

Kird nodded.

"Kird's out of his mind," said Jane. "Too much success during the past year and he's running wild."

Edgerlane waved her aside. "You're sure of a conviction, Kird?"

"Very sure, sir. Sworn statements from five honest men and eight crooks. I—er—worked on the crooks myself, and their stories are perfect. I can back them up with letters and a tapped wire. Your papers got the story in time for the first morning edition."

Edgerlane motioned to Jane. "Get me Johnston on the *Record*. Use a direct wire. If Hensdrel's out on bail, I want to know who furnished it."

Jane shook her head. "Not now, Mr. Edgerlane, please. You said there were four guests coming at nine-thirty, and you probably haven't had a thing to eat since noon. I'll order some salad and—"

"Jane!" said the old publisher. "Call Johnston, or give me that phone!"

"You're going to eat something first," said Jane quietly. She rang for the butler and spoke to him while Edgerlane pounded the desk-top and called her a fool. Kird seated himself before the desk and wondered again. Wondered, and didn't like the things he was wondering about. No editor would disobey this man's orders more than once—neither would many Senators, for that matter. But Jane wasn't even listening. Instead, she was clearing a space on the desk, pushing aside the jade inkstand and penholder, stacking the mail and weighting it down with a slender knife of jade, while her employer argued and yelled for the phone.

KIRD was interested in Hensdrel's bail, too. He reached for the phone and looked at Jane.

"Mind if I make the call?" he asked.

"Not at all."

"Thanks," said Kird, and asked the girl on the house switchboard to ring the editor. A moment later Johnston answered his questions. He shrugged and turned to Edgerlane: "Hensdrel doesn't want bail. Says he'll stay in the Tombs and rest. Johnston thinks he's

afraid some one may kill him to keep him from talking. May he print that?"

"Any objections?" asked Edgerlane.

"It's only a guess," said Kird.

Edgerlane's eyes laughed. "More than that, Mr. Special Prosecuting Attorney. It's fact—tell Johnston to print it."

THE butler served Edgerlane's dinner, and left the library.

"What next?" Kird asked.

"Please wait until Mr. Edgerlane has finished eating," said Jane. "No matter how important Jimmy Hensdrel is, he'll keep for a half-hour."

"He'll keep for five years once I get him into the witness-chair," said Kird.

"Like to get him into a more exciting chair?" asked the publisher. He pushed the salad away. "The electric chair, for instance?"

"Please finish your salad," said Jane.

"Not now, Jane—not now!" Edgerlane shook a finger at Kird. "You beat me to it by one day, Mister. I've been after Hensdrel—after him hard. I can swear he's the man we both want—the last link to the man who would like to be dictator of America."

Kird shook his head. "If he has a boss, Hensdrel will keep his mouth shut. He knows the rules—he's helped to make them. Five years in jail is better than a bullet in the back."

"But the bullet is a gamble," said the publisher. "With the evidence that I've gathered, you can seat him firmly in the electric chair and tighten the straps. That's not a gamble—that's a sure thing. He'll talk!"

"He will," Kird agreed, "if he's sure of the chair."

"Suppose I told you he killed Joe Tarrio—invited him to his apartment and shot him."

"You can prove that?"

"Definitely! I've got sworn statements from three reputable eyewitnesses. Have them right in my safe here." He motioned to Jane. "Get me that Hensdrel folder, Jane."

"When you've finished your tea."

"Oh, Lord!" said the publisher. He looked at Kird helplessly. "Can you wait until I finish this confounded tea?"

"I'll sit up all night to get a squint at that evidence," said Kird. "But how far does it go? Does it lead to some one higher up?"

"Straight as a die! It leads to a would-be dictator; and when Hensdrel talks, we'll have him cold."

"Hensdrel doesn't want bail. Johnston thinks he's afraid some one may kill him to keep him from talking."



He gulped the tea and pushed the cup aside. When he lifted the lid of the jade cigarette-box, Jane pointed to a humidor on a stand near his chair.

"The doctor said no cigarettes. There's one cigar in the humidor, and that's all for this evening."

"Nonsense! Let me have one of your cigarettes, Kird."

"All out of them," said Kird. "Sorry."

"Are you in this damnable conspiracy too? No cigarettes, no wine, no meat, no anything—"

Kird shook his head and turned to look from the library window toward the gardens that ringed the house at Deepwood. A dog bayed in the distance, and Kird watched a heavy-set figure patrolling a walk that led away from the wide stone veranda. One of Edgerlane's guards. And the dog was working for the publisher as well. A dozen trained animals were on duty throughout the day and night. Gentle fellows, if they knew you—killers, if they didn't.

"Jane said something about your guests," said Kird. "Do I know them?"

"Oh, my guests—four very interesting men: The first is Senator Willman. You know him, Kird—the gentleman who doesn't like the present Administration and says so."

"Yes, I know him," said Kird. "He's probably the most ruthless man ever elected to the Senate. He'd sell his soul to be President, and sell his party along with it. I've always wondered how he wangles his nominations."

"Demands them," said the publisher. "He's boss of the State—and make no mistake about it."

"He's an opportunist and a gambler," added Jane. "I don't like the man."

Edgerlane smiled. "The voters don't agree with you, Jane. But perhaps you'll like our second guest for the evening—Sam Plover, once a truck-driver, but now the most powerful labor leader in the country. Sam and I don't get along very well. He didn't like it when I accused him of violating a contract and calling a strike to better his position with his men. But it was truth and I proved it."

"Friend of Hensdrel's, isn't he?" asked Kird.



Connought started forward.
"Carey, you're acting like
an idiot!" he snapped.

"Well, they've had business dealings. Plover is politically ambitious, I think."

"He'd make a better Senator than Willman," said Jane quietly. "But I can't understand why you've invited him to Deepwood this evening."

"Neither can he!" laughed Edgerlane. "He and the others think I want to discuss the coming campaign."

"Who are they?" asked Kird.

"One is Colonel Edward Times, who was asked to retire from the army five years ago because of constant attacks upon his superiors. Quite a man, Colonel Times—a good organizer."

"Very good," agreed Kird. "He's built a following that runs into the millions perhaps, with his Sunday-morning radio speeches. Organized the Americana Federation and runs Congress ragged when his followers start sending telegrams."

"I don't like him," said Jane. "He's a demagogue and a fool."

"A demagogue, perhaps," said Edgerlane, "but certainly not a fool. The man is aggressive, courageous and a definite figure in the present political situation. He claims to control twenty million votes, and I'll concede him half that number."

"I'll be glad to meet him," said Kird. "And who is the fourth, sir?"

"A friend of Jane's," said the publisher. "I think you've seen him here at Deepwood, Kird. He's president of the Winsdale Electrical Company. Mark Connought—remember him?"

"Very well," said Kird. "You once called him a war profiteer and made it stick."

"That was long ago," laughed Edgerlane, "and we've patched up our quarrel."

"Went broke in the crash, didn't he?"

"Not quite," said Edgerlane. "He has managed to retain his standing in the business world. A good man at finance."

"And a very considerate gentleman," added Jane. She made a mouth at Kird.

Kird recalled another week-end at Deepwood when Mark had been there. Not a pleasant week-end for Kird, for Connought had managed to take up most of Jane's free moments.

"Quite a gathering," said Kird. "Anything can happen when that crowd gets together."

"Thought you'd like it," said Edgerlane. "When I spring a few ideas I have in mind, we're going to hear fireworks."

JANE walked to a wall switch and snapped on additional lights, then drew the drapery away from the windows and looked for a moment into the night. Then she turned to face her employer.

"You're making a mistake, Mr. Edgerlane," she said coolly. "I've agreed with you on this dictator idea, but now I think



"Shut up and stand still,"
said Kird. "You too, Plover—
—stay where you are."

you've allowed it to go too far. Mark Connought is all right, but everything you say to Colonel Times will be distorted and fed to that army of radio fans. Senator Willman is crooked and can't be trusted. As for Sam Plover—"

"Please, Jane," said Edgerlane. "I haven't asked for your opinion. I've invited four prominent guests to Deepwood for a very definite reason—I want to uncover a would-be dictator."

"And you think this man is behind all of the rackets in the country?" asked Kird.

"Most of them," said the publisher. "He needs money to erect a Fascist state—plenty of money. It has to be money he can spend without an accounting. Money for propaganda and organization. Legitimate income can be checked—but money that comes from the rackets is his to spend as he pleases."

"I wish you'd forget the whole thing and stay in the newspaper business where you belong," said Jane. "The doctor warned you against excitement. You'll wind up in a hospital! You're too important to risk your life in—"

"That will be enough, young lady," said Edgerlane. He hadn't moved from his chair, but Kird suddenly realized why men took orders from the publisher—took them and obeyed them. He was looking at Jane steadily, and his voice was low. "If you don't like my plans, I'd suggest you drive to the city for the week-end, Jane."

"I'll stay at Deepwood."

"A week-end in town will be good for you," said Edgerlane slowly. "You've been cooped up here on the end of Long Island too long. Tell one of the men to drive you in."

"I'll stay at Deepwood," Jane repeated.

Edgerlane's fist came down upon the desk top. "See here, young lady, you're not mistress of Deepwood just yet! Do as you're told."

For an instant Jane faced him; then her eyes filled and she turned away. She was running by the time she reached the library door, and Kird heard her feet hurrying up the wide stairs that led to the upper floor. He turned to watch the guards passing and repassing the windows of the library, and wished he had not heard the argument. It made him remember those whispers linking her name with her employer's. He was glad when the butler announced that a car had entered the driveway to the estate. He turned—to find Edgerlane beside him.

"You'll have to forgive both of us, Kird," he said. "Jane has been working long hours with me on this case. She's tired, and so am I. Unfortunately, I'm afraid she's right—about the doctor's orders, at least."

"Then why not call off the meeting?"

"Oh, no! I've planned this for weeks. We'll go through with it tonight, Kird."

He put his arm through the prosecuting attorney's and walked with him to the wide veranda. An expensive machine had stopped between the lights at the foot of the stairs, and Kird saw portly Senator Willman, briefcase in one hand, silver-topped cane in the other. Willman spoke to his chauffeur, watched the car drive toward the servants' quarters. He came up the stairs.

"Good evening, Senator," said Edgerlane. He extended his hand. "Say hello to Kird Carey—you've met him. He'll take you to the library and I'll join you in a moment."

Kird shook hands with the Senator and was surprised at the strength in the older man's grip. Another car was in the driveway, and Kird stepped aside to let Willman precede him into the house.

"**Q**UITE a place Edgerlane has here on the Island," said the Senator. "Coming through the estate reminded me of driving into a jail."

"Yes, there's plenty of protection," said Kird. "The estate is ringed by an electrified fence with guards at the gates. Then there's a strip within the fence that has been cleared and sodded. It's covered by flood-lights day and night. Sort of a No Man's Land."

"Interesting," said Willman.

Kird led the way to the library.

"Two of Deverant's men found it interesting last week. They hadn't gone ten feet before the guards got them."

"Killed them?"

"That's what the coroner said," Kird agreed. "Excuse me, Senator. I think the others have arrived."

For Waldo Edgerlane was ushering Sam Plover and Colonel Times into the library. Both men showed surprise at finding the Senator at Deepwood—Plover with a characteristic growl and lowering of his bushy eyebrows, and the Colonel with a slightly cynical smile. The publisher let the situation sizzle for a moment.

"Most of you gentlemen have met," he said at length. "If you haven't seen Kird Carey in person, you've seen his picture in the newspapers."

"That goes both ways," said Kird, and extended a hand to Sam Plover. "Glad to know you, Plover." He turned to Colonel Times: "And you, Colonel."

The Colonel used the cynical smile again. "Well, if we must meet, Mr. Carey, I'd rather face you from one of these chairs than the witness-chair."

Plover said nothing. He dragged an oversized pipe from his coat pocket, stuffed it, touched a match to the tobacco. At his host's suggestion, he took one of the chairs that faced the desk in a semicircle, and made himself comfortable. When the Colonel was seated, Edgerlane walked to a cabinet near the library doors and drew out a wooden box.

"I hope you gentlemen will excuse the precautions I must take here at Deepwood," he said. "Because of numerous attempts upon my life I've been forced to lead the existence of a guarded recluse. But it's all worth-while, gentlemen. Very much worth while, if I can die knowing I have accomplished some good in the world."

He took a heavy automatic from the box and placed it on an end table beside Sam Plover's chair. The labor leader lifted those heavy eyebrows.

"What the devil—" he said.

Edgerlane placed another gun beside Senator Willman and another next to the Colonel. "Merely an additional precaution," he said. "The estate is perfectly guarded, but if an emergency should arise, I want my guests to be able to protect themselves." He glanced at Kird: "You, of course, have your own gun, Kird?"

"Yes sir," said Kird. And he wondered what emergency was expected by the publisher.

THE butler at the library door announced Mark Connought. A minute later Connought came into the room, nodded to Kird and apologized to the publisher for being late. He was a small man, forty or thereabouts and immaculately dressed in a gray business suit. He wore a close-cropped brown mustache, rimless glasses and walked with the springy step of an athlete. Kird never had liked him. Didn't like him now. The man was a little too sure of himself. He seemed sure of Jane also.

"Just in time, Mark," said Edgerlane. He placed a gun at Connought's elbow. "Excuse the artillery, but it's necessary." He touched a button on his desk, and the butler entered. "See if Miss Marleigh has gone to the city, Morton. If not, ask her to stop in before she leaves."

The butler bowed and left the room, and Mark Connought pushed back a coat-sleeve to glance at his wrist-watch.

"I'm afraid Jane can't get into town tonight, Mr. Edgerlane," he said. "I was late because of the traffic on the roads."

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They'll be utterly impassable in a few minutes."

"Why?" asked Edgerlane casually.

"Oh, the army has decided to try a blackout—another importation from Europe, but one with some merit."

"So they have!" said the publisher. "I'd forgotten that, Mark." And he, too, glanced at his wrist-watch. "Yes—the roads will be closed very shortly."

"WHAT the devil is a blackout?" asked Plover. His pipe made clouds about his iron-gray hair.

"A war maneuver," said Edgerlane. "We have a few airplane factories in this section of Long Island—natural targets for an invading flight of enemy bombers. They are protected, of course, by anti-aircraft batteries and a pursuit unit, but the army has decided to test these defenses. With the cooperation of the public, there will be a very realistic attack by the 'enemy' tonight. This section of Long Island will be plunged into darkness at exactly ten o'clock. Bombers will attack and try to take pictures of the aircraft factories—each picture will score as a hit. A very interesting experiment, don't you think?"

"Very," said Plover. "But why all the darkness?"

"Merely simulating war conditions," said Edgerlane. "The attacking planes will fly over the dark area, drop flares wherever they spot a factory, and take photographs."

The butler entered and told Edgerlane Jane could not be located.

"Probably drove herself to town," said Edgerlane. He dismissed the butler, asked him to close the door on the way out, and turned again to his guests. "To make this test of any value, there must, of course, be an area of perfect blackness. But this will in no way affect our conference. Deepwood has its own electrical plant that cuts in automatically when the outside power supply fails."

Colonel Times laughed. "In that case we will be a perfect target for the enemy bombers, Mr. Edgerlane. Have you thought of that?"

"Oh, yes, Colonel," said the publisher. "I've given orders to screen all of our lights." He motioned to Kird. "Draw the draperies across the windows, Kird, if you please. We may be a trifle warm in here, but we'll be good Americans tonight. And by that same token, gentlemen, I would suggest we all remove our coats and be comfortable."

Suiting his actions to his words, Edgerlane took off his coat, and the others in the room did likewise. Mark Connought sat to the right of the semicircle that faced Edgerlane, not far from the black lacquer screen that hid Jane's typewriter. Next to him was Colonel Times, a military figure even in his shirt-sleeves. Sam Plover was on the Colonel's left—sprawled out in his chair like a huge bear with a cloud-rimmed pipe. Senator Willman was seated between Plover and Kird.

Kird looked along the curved line that faced the publisher and wondered at the thoughts in each man's mind. Each knew something definite was to be settled this night—Edgerlane didn't call conferences for little things. And behind this was Kird's knowledge of the mission Edgerlane had undertaken—to uncover the madman who wanted to be dictator of America.

Was he here in this room? Had one of these men been using the rackets to gather a war-chest? Or was this simply another link in the publisher's chain that would lead to the man at the top? Kird didn't know, but before the evening was over he expected to find out. And then Edgerlane leaned back in his chair behind the wide desk, lifted a paper and adjusted his reading-glasses.

"Gentlemen," he said slowly, "you are each wondering why I have asked you to meet here this evening. And soon you will know. But first, let me remind you we are all Americans—citizens of a country for which it would be a privilege to die: a country born out of suffering and oppression. A great man made that birth possible—George Washington, our first President. He sacrificed all he had and was willing to sacrifice his life, that a dream might be fulfilled."

"SEEMS I read that in history," said Plover sarcastically.

"Have you ever read American history?" asked the Senator. "I'm surprised to hear you admit it, Plover."

"T'hell with you, Willman!" growled Plover.

"Please, gentlemen!" said Edgerlane. "My talk will be brief but it is necessary to remind you this country was not born yesterday, nor did it become great except through sacrifice. Now it is threatened again. Perhaps another sacrifice is necessary. If so, the man who makes it may properly go down in history as a worthy successor to our great patriots."

"You mean there is talk of revolution?" asked Colonel Times quickly. "A serious threat?"

"Worse than that, Colonel. There is a deliberate plan to place a demagogue in control of America."

"Nonsense!" said Times.

"A good newspaper story," said Plover. "But I can't think of anyone who wants that job right now."

"There is such a man in the White House!" cried Senator Willman. "Give me the proof I need, and I promise you gentlemen I will denounce him from the floor of the United States Senate!"

"You've been doing that for months without any proof!" laughed Connought.

"I might expect that from you, Connought," said the Senator. "You want war, and I know it. You're an officer in three munitions firms. Can you deny that?"

"Deny it?" said Connought. "I'm proud of it—that is, of my position in the munitions firms. As for war, there's plenty of it in Europe. We don't need it here. It would hurt business."

"Business!" said Colonel Times, very coldly. "Unless the working-man gets a better deal, there won't be any business left in this country."

"There isn't much now," smiled Connought.

"Thanks to you," said Plover. He hunched forward in his chair and shook his pipe at Connought. "We're about ready to have a little chat with you fellows at your electrical company—yeah, just about ready."

"That can come later, gentlemen," said Edgerlane. He glanced again at the paper in his hand and then winked at Kird. "Tonight, my friend Kird Carey has told me he has had caused the arrest of Jimmy Hensdrel. And it is expected Mr. Hensdrel will do some tall talking at his trial if he hopes to escape the electric chair. Briefly, he will name the single man in control of the rackets—the man who in my opinion would like to be dictator of America."

FOR an instant there was silence as the publisher's remarks drove home. Then Plover and Connought and Times and Willman fired questions at Edgerlane like district attorneys before a cracking witness. He smiled but said nothing; and Kird leaned forward to lift a protesting hand.

"If you please, Mr. Edgerlane," he said. "I can and will send Hensdrel to

prison, but don't you think it would be wiser to wait until—"

"Why must we wait, Kird?" asked Edgerlane. "I don't blame you for being skeptical, but I haven't told you all I know. In fact, I've told no one." He tapped a thin forefinger against his forehead and leaned across the desk. "But the facts that are stored in my mind, when pieced together, will definitely convict Hensdrel of murder. And to prove it, I intend to take you gentlemen into my confidence and ask for your help."

"Is this flattery or bribery?" asked Plover.

Edgerlane laughed. "Both, perhaps." He glanced again at his watch. "It is just one minute to ten, gentlemen. May I remind you the blackout is scheduled for ten o'clock? And may I also remind you of the guns I have provided? If anything should go wrong, I hope you use care in handling them."

"Never mind the guns," said Senator Willman. "What about Hensdrel?"

"I suggest you keep that information for the present, Mr. Edgerlane," said Kird. "When four men know a thing, it's a secret no longer."

"I agree with you, Kird," said the publisher. "But there is no longer a need for secrecy. When Hensdrel talks, he sends our would-be dictator to jail for a good many years. Possibly for life."

"I'd be interested in hearing the evidence," said Willman.

"I'll bet you would," laughed Connought.

Edgerlane reached into the humidor and took out the single cigar. He carefully clipped the end, put the cigar into his mouth and lighted it. Then he smiled at his guests.

"Very well, gentlemen—here it is." He paused, and a distant drone was heard against the stillness of the room. Then it became recognizable as the throb of airplane propellers at a great height. "Our friends the enemy. And if they were actually foreign bombers, they could do less damage in a thousand raids than a single American who would destroy his own country."

Kird knew a tingling sensation as the constant drone grew stronger. An eerie, unexplainable sense of danger that lent menace to the sound. It carried a promise of hate and of death.

"They must have circled over Long Island Sound," said Colonel Times. "Probably sent another fleet in from the ocean side."

"The antiaircraft guns will take care of them nicely," said Connought. "Once the planes are sighted, those guns are sure death."

"You should know," said Willman. "Your company makes them."

"You'll be glad they do, if war comes," said Connought.

"Devil take the war!" said Plover. "Let's hear about Jimmy Hensdrel and this fellow who wants to be dictator."

"Yes, Mr. Edgerlane," said Times. "You promised something exciting."

"It will be," said Edgerlane. He lifted his voice slightly to be clear above the sound of the approaching planes. His cigar was at an angle in his mouth, and he tilted his head to keep the smoke from his eyes. "I can definitely prove to the satisfaction of any jury that Jimmy Hensdrel—deliberately and with malice aforethought—murdered a man by the name of—"

THE room was at that instant plunged into a darkness so complete that it pressed against Kird's eyes like a wall of black water. He lifted a hand, held it close to his face. Then he turned and saw the red glow that circled the tip of Edgerlane's cigar. It was the single spot of color in an otherwise black room.

"Hold everything," said Kird. "I'll open the drapes, and we'll get some light in here."

"What about those other lights—the emergency system?" cried Connought.

"What's going on here?" yelled Willman. "Is this a trap—a trick?"

"Oh, sit down and shut up!" said Plover's deep growl.

"A little darkness can't do us any harm," said Colonel Times quietly. He was slightly amused, by the tone of his voice. "Open the drapes, Mr. Carey."

Kird pulled aside the heavy hangings. There was no moon. A circle of tall oaks showed black against the sky; then the heavens were flooded with light—huge white balls of flaring brilliance. The bombers had sighted a target and were dropping flares. Three—six—a dozen circles of light blossomed against the heavens, and the surrounding landscape was bathed in a cold white glow. Searchlights stabbed into and through it—reached into the upper night and caught a flight of huge aircraft. There was a distant rumble of guns. The antiaircraft battery had gone into action.

Kird turned away from the window. A silvery whiteness had flowed into the



room and lighted it more brilliantly than had the original electric lamps. It showed four men standing rigidly before their chairs. Each was staring toward the publisher's desk. Edgerlane's head was tilted back. His cigar had slipped from his lips and was smoldering upon the rug. The hilt of a jade paper-knife was flush with his throat.

All this Kird saw at a single glance. Then he saw Jane Marleigh beside the publisher. Her eyes were wide; one of her hands was upon Edgerlane's shoulder. The other was held tightly to her mouth.

"Jane!" cried Kird.

His voice broke the tension. "Get a doctor in here!" cried Plover. He ran to the library door and twisted the knob. It refused to move, and he pulled again. Senator Willman had stepped to the long French windows that led to the terrace. He tried to open one, but with no success.

"Stay where you are," said Kird, facing the others. "No use trying to open any windows or doors. When the electric current failed, they locked automatically."

"You mean we can't get out?" yelled Willman.

"Exactly," said Kird. "I also mean no one could have come in since ten o'clock. Does that suggest anything to you?"

"Definitely," said Colonel Times. "It means the person who killed Waldo Edgerlane is right here in this room."

"Yes," said Kird slowly. "Right here—where I can put my hands on him." His hand that held the gun was steady. "I hope one of you decide to shoot it out with me."

In the distance antiaircraft artillery roared above the chatter of machine-guns. Pursuit planes flashed upward along the moving arms of giant search-lights, while overhead the bombers still droned their monotonous song. A pilot sighted another target, and a dozen more flares blossomed into spreading buds of phosphorescent brilliance—a cold white light that touched Edgerlane's lips and seemed to make them grin.

THEN Kird looked again at Jane. One hand was still lifted. She saw him coming, and she took a step backward.

"Don't move, Jane," said Kird. "Stay just where you are."

"But—but he's dead," she said. The words were almost a whisper. "He's been killed, Kird—*killed*."

It was as though she were repeating with the deliberate intent of impressing the words upon her mind. The fingers of her left hand were curled with the knuckles against her right cheek. Her eyes, bright with tears, moved slowly from Kird to the murdered publisher, and then to Kird again.

Kird went to Edgerlane—felt for pulse and heart-beat, held his watch-face to the dark-stained lips. There was no sign of heart-beat, no clouding of breath on the watch-crystal.

"Gone!" he said.

There was a blue marking-crayon on Edgerlane's desk, and Kird drew a circle about the position of Jane's feet upon the light-green rug. Connought had started forward, but Kird swung the muzzle of his gun toward the man.

"Hold it, Connought," he said. Then he turned to face the others. "Right where you are—don't move."

"Carey, you're acting like an idiot!" snapped Connought.

"Shut up and stand still," said Kird. He bent and marked the position of Connought's feet on the rug, then moved a few paces to his right and did the same with Colonel Times. "You, too, Plover—stay where you are."

"I've moved a dozen times since the lights went out," said the labor leader. "What good will this do?"

"No good, perhaps," said Kird. He went on to where the Senator was standing, and marked his position.

"Don't forget your own," said Connought.

"I won't."

Kird circled a spot in front of his own chair that was nearest the windows;

then he tossed the crayon onto the desk and took the black lacquer screen from the corner where it had been concealing Jane's typewriter. He set it carefully in front of Edgerlane's body and came to face the guests again. Another group of flares had burst into light, and made wavering shadows in the silent room.

"Six of us in the room," Kird said at length. "One of us had a good reason to kill Mr. Edgerlane, and pulled a fast job. He didn't know the failure of the current would lock all of the doors and windows—didn't know he'd have to prove himself innocent before he left Deepwood. But he will."

"A little twisted, aren't you, Mr. Carey?" said Times. "I understood the law worked just the reverse—a man is innocent until he is proved guilty."

"That's the law," said Kird shortly. "But we're not going to use that law tonight."

"I protest!" said Senator Willman. "I demand the proper officials be notified immediately and—"

"SHUT up!" said Kird. He leaned back against the publisher's desk and pointed toward the black lacquer screen. "The man behind that screen made me—gave me every chance I ever had; with his help I could have burned Jimmy Hensdrel and found the maniac who wants to be dictator of this country. But one of you stopped that. You were afraid of what he'd say, so you killed him. Killed my friend to keep him from turning you up."

"He happened to be my friend too," said Connought.

"And mine," said Willman. "We were the best of friends—never a quarrel in years."

"Well, well, well," said Plover slowly. He looked from one to another. "I guess Colonel Times was his pal too. So that leaves me out in the cold."

"It puts you right with the others," said Kird. "One of the men in this room killed Edgerlane, and—"

"One of the *men*?" said Plover. His eyes rested upon Jane. "That girl was at his elbow. Her hand wasn't twelve inches from his throat. Why not ask her the reason she killed Edgerlane?"

"I didn't," said Jane. "You know that, Kird."

"Maybe *he* does," said Plover. "But I don't."

Kird's mind painted a momentary scene. He watched the publisher pound-

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ing a fist against the desk-top as he faced Jane. Heard him say: "Young lady, you're not mistress of Deepwood just yet." The color had gone from Jane's face then. Her eyes had filled, and Kird recalled how she ran from the room.

CONNOUGHT stepped forward. "It won't work, Plover," he said. "I'll vouch for Jane."

"You'll vouch for her?" said Plover. He laughed.

Connought faced him like a terrier before a mastiff. "You heard what I said! Jane Marleigh is my friend. I've known her for years. Only a fool or an idiot would think she had anything to do with this murder."

Senator Willman had seated himself and was mopping his forehead with his handkerchief. He blinked when additional flares from the bombing planes poured light into the room.

"Of course I'm only a Senator—not a prosecuting attorney," he said. "But there are a few questions that suggest themselves. Pertinent questions, Miss Marleigh!"

"What are they?" asked Jane quietly.

"Why were you here in the room?" asked the Senator. "Your employer didn't know—I heard him send the butler after you. And if there is any foundation to the rumors I've heard, can it be possible you are mentioned in Mr. Edgerlane's will?"

Connought faced the Senator. "You're a filthy-minded old devil," he said. "If rumors are going to be brought into this, I can drag out a few, Willman. There was a munitions deal you were interested in that smelled to high heaven."

"But it doesn't clear that girl," said Plover. "I don't spend much time on Broadway, but I've heard things too."

"So have I," said Colonel Times. He had seated himself, crossed his legs, and was smiling the dry and cheerless smile he used when cornering an adversary in debate. "I've heard Senator Willman and Sam Plover needed Edgerlane's support but didn't expect to get it. I also happen to know Jane Marleigh has used her influence against the good and patriotic Senator."

"I refute that, Times!" cried the Senator. "It was a malicious remark that has no bearing on the case. Jane Marleigh murdered her employer, and I insist she be charged with the crime!"

"Spoken like a great statesman," laughed Times. "The girl looks like an

easy touch, so Willman jumps for the bandwagon."

"That's a lie!"

"Who cares?" growled Plover. "This isn't a courtroom." He faced Kird and pushed a stubby forefinger against his chest. "Report this to the proper authorities, and let's get out of here. Use the phone and make it fast, Carey."

The fingers of Kird's left hand pushed Plover against the chair and sat him down.

"You've had your say, Plover." He turned to the others. "So have all of you. I've let you talk, and now it's my turn."

Plover started toward his feet. "Don't get tough with me, Carey. I won't take it."

"Yes, you will," said Kird. "You'll take it and like it. All of you!"

Willman puffed out his cheeks. "Fine talk from a Special Prosecuting Attorney! Edgerlane should have left you on the gangster squad where you belong!"

"But he didn't," Colonel Times reminded. "Better keep quiet, Senator."

"Save it," said Kird. "You're all going to stay at Deepwood until we find the man who killed Edgerlane."

"Or the woman," said Plover.

NOW the last flare had drifted to the surrounding meadows; the room was covered by the gathering darkness; then the wall-lights winked, flickered and filled the room with light. It was a soft yellow brilliance that came as a relief from the coldness of the bombers' flares. Kird walked to a door that led to the front veranda and motioned to a guard. The man's gun was in his hand, and he held a straining dog at the length of a short chain.

"Anything wrong, Mr. Carey?"

"Plenty," said Kird. "Close the outer gates—no one enters or leaves Deepwood until I give the order. Same thing with the house. Keep the servants where they are. No phone-calls in or out. Get going!"

The guard left with the dog trotting ahead of him. Kird walked to a door that led to the swimming-pool terrace and gave duplicate instructions to another guard. Overhead, the last of the planes was racing toward the army landing-field. Plover and Colonel Times were putting on their coats, and Kird made no objection. Jane and Connought had drawn a little apart from the others,

and were in low-voiced conversation. Senator Willman stood up, coughed importantly and shook a finger at Kird.

"I don't like this, young man," he said. "I'm going to town—want to speak with my attorneys."

"You're staying," said Kird. "All of you."

Plover's laugh was deep. "And if we decide not to stay?"

Kird's temper flared. "First, Plover, I'll give my office orders to start an investigation of that last seaman's strike. There was a watchman killed in it."

"That was no fault of mine," said Plover.

"Maybe not. But an investigation won't help your political chances." Kird pointed at Willman: "As for you, Senator—would you like me to dig up a bribery charge Mr. Edgerlane told me about?"

"You can't prove a thing!"

"I don't doubt it. But I can lose a lot of votes for you." He turned to Colonel Times: "Do you want me to investigate the dues collected by your outfits, Colonel?"

"I welcome an investigation, Mr. Carey," said Times. "However, there is a time and place for everything."

"And it would be a tough time to get caught just before election, Colonel," said Kird. He waved aside Times' objections, and faced Mark Connought. "How about you? Can your stock deals stand the light, Connought?"

"You don't have to threaten me, Carey," said Connought. "I'll stay, willingly. Jane needs one friend at Deepwood."

Kird looked at the guns on the end tables, and thought it strange none had been used to commit the murder. Why a knife, when a gun was handy? In the darkness Edgerlane's cigar-tip had made a perfect target. A burst of shots—confusion—noise—men scrambling about the room—why, it would have been easy. Much easier than a thrust with a jade-handled paper-knife.

HE went to the desk and opened an upper drawer. Edgerlane had often used a small magnifying-glass. It was in its case, and Kird took it behind the black screen. He bent toward the knife and examined the hilt carefully. It was smooth and green and highly polished. Experts might bring up a print, but Kird doubted it. He came from behind the screen and put the glass upon the desk.

"Any finger-prints, Mr. Detective?" asked Connought.

Kird pointed to the handkerchief in Mark's breast pocket. "Each of you have handkerchiefs," he said. "It was warm, and you used them frequently. But don't let that make you feel good."

JANE, careful not to look behind the screen, had gone to the desk. Quite automatically she started to tidy the papers on the top. Kird turned from Connought and waved her away.

"Don't touch anything, Jane!"

"But I'm only putting the papers in order, Kird."

"Leave them alone!" Kird insisted. He turned to the others. "If you'll step through the doorway at the far end of the library, I'll ask the butler to serve you with brandy, coffee or whatever you wish. Make yourselves comfortable, but don't go out of that room."

"Thanks for nothing," growled Plover.

He crossed the library and walked to the large hall that served as a combination dining- and living-room. The mansion at Deepwood was built in the form of a wide crescent, with a star-shaped swimming-pool within the arms of the semicircular building. A stone veranda fronted the house, and an entrance hall gave directly onto a vaulted room in the bowl of the crescent. This single chamber extended upward to the roof and was spacious enough to accommodate thirty or more people comfortably. To the right was a billiard-room, and beyond it the kitchens and pantries. To the left was Edgerlane's library, and farther along the arm of the crescent were the music- and card-rooms. Each opened onto the garden terrace that flanked the star-shaped pool.

The upper floors were reached by wide stairs that climbed to the right and left from the end of the huge living-room. Individual suites of bedrooms and baths extended along the curving arms, each having access to an inner balcony by way of tall French windows. Stairs led down at each end of the balcony to the pool and gardens.

Unorthodox and peculiar, it had been built to please a peculiar fancy of the publisher. From the sky, Deepwood Mansion appeared as a white crescent and glistening star against a background of deepest green. A flag of the Orient, perhaps, with a border of light where the electrified fence and strip of No-Man's-Land edged the estate.

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Willman and Colonel Times followed Plover into the living-room, but Mark Connought stayed for a moment as though anxious to talk with Jane. Kird nodded toward the door.

"See you later, Connought."

"Are you going to question Jane now?"

"Any objections?"

"Certainly," said Mark. "I expect to see that her rights as a citizen are not forgotten. Gangster squad methods may be all very well for you, Carey—I don't like them."

"Sorry," said Kird. He grabbed Connought by the arm and started him toward the door. "You'd be a sucker to argue with me now, Connought. Get going!"

"Let go of me, Carey!" yelled Mark. "I'll break you if—"

"Get going," Kird repeated.

He pushed Connought through the doorway and closed the door. Then he looked at Jane, and pointed toward the black lacquer screen.

"Were you behind that during the conference?"

"Yes."

"Sneaked behind it when we went out to welcome the guests?"

"I didn't sneak."

"Walked, then. Why?"

"Because I knew Mr. Edgerlane was going to do it."

Kird caught her elbows. "Going to do what?"

Jane made no effort to break from his grip. She stood quietly before him, eyes looking up into his own, and her lips drawn hard against her teeth. Kird caught the fragrance of the rose pinned

to her jacket; he watched the slight flare of her nostrils as she breathed. He tightened his grip upon her elbows.

"What was it you knew?" he asked.

"I knew he'd do it, Kird," she said.

"He'd talked to me so many times about that dictator idea. Night after night he's been working and thinking, trying to determine who is behind the rackets. Yesterday he showed me the list of men he suspected, then he narrowed it down to these four."

"And then?" asked Kird.

"He claimed you would get the right man if he helped you. I asked him not to risk his life. But he said it would be worth his life to find the dictator. Said he'd be willing to die to stop him."

"Mr. Edgerlane said that?"

"Yes, Kird."

"And that's why you argued with him this evening?"

"Yes."

Kird rubbed his forehead. It was beginning to ache. Jane's story sounded plausible here in the library at Deep-



"Anything wrong, Mr. Carey?" asked the guard. "Plenty," said Kird, from the veranda.

wood. It wouldn't be worth a nickel in court. And it was possible the butler had heard the argument.

"What did he mean when he said you weren't mistress of Deepwood?" he asked slowly.

"Oh, that," said Jane. "He knew how I loved Deepwood, and he promised it would be mine when he—when he died."

"Wrote it into his will?"

"I think so."

Kird's hands caught the desk-top, and he stared hard at Jane. She saw the expression on his face, and her hand went to her mouth.

"Kird—you don't think—you can't think that I—"

"And you were the only one without a gun," said Kird, thinking aloud in the terms of a prosecutor. "You were close to the knife, and—"

"Kird, stop!" she cried. "You can't believe that!"

"I don't count, Jane," he said. "It's what the jury believes—what a prosecuting attorney can make them believe."

"You do believe it, though," she said quickly. "You—you and your hard-headed way of thinking. Right to the point, isn't it? Kird Carey's a genius—a fast thinker—he can—"

Kird reached forward, caught her arms and forced her into one of the chairs. He didn't mind hysterics. He'd seen plenty of excited women during his days on the gangster squad. Seen them and questioned them about the murders of their men. And he'd learned a lesson on the squad that had often helped in his prosecutions—one that taught him love and murder can be tightly tied. He'd talked with girls who were just as beautiful as was Jane. Soft, feminine, wide-eyed girls who looked less like killers than they did like angels. But he'd traced murder guns right to the hands of some, and known he'd been outwitted by others.

HE thought of these girls as he looked at Jane. And he thought of weekends he'd spent at Deepwood. When the publisher had sat near the edge of the pool and watched Jane racing with Kird from point to point of the liquid star—a laughing Jane who could tease with her lips and promise with her eyes. A girl who had caught the publisher's attention when she worked in one of his newspaper offices and had been singled out, just as Kird had been picked by Edgerlane, for a chance at better things.

There had been evenings, too, at Deepwood. Spring nights when Jane and Kird walked along the paths of the pine grove. Kird had dreamed, then, of sharing a governor's mansion with a brown-haired girl. He hadn't spoken the dreams aloud, but Jane must have sensed them. She teased him often; and when Mark Connought was at Deepwood, Kird's dreams grew distant. Jane liked Mark—she often told Kird he could profit by a few lessons from the business man.

"Any more questions?" asked Jane. She was quiet now.

KIRD drew a deep breath: "About Mr. Edgerlane—you came to the library tonight to protect him?"

"Yes, Kird."

"What happened?"

She pointed to the screen. "That was in the corner, and I stood behind it. When the lights went out, I ran toward the chair, but missed it in the darkness. I was beside the desk when you went to the window to draw back the drapes. I started to reach toward Mr. Edgerlane when some one hit me—knocked me out of the way."

"Who was it?" cried Kird.

"I don't know. It was dark, and his arm hit against my cheek. Here,"—she pointed to a bruise on her face—"right here, Kird. I stumbled backward, and had just reached Mr. Edgerlane's side when the flares lit the room."

Kird leaned forward to examine the bruise on her cheek. Even as he did so, he realized a district attorney would make capital of it—say Edgerlane had thrown up a hand to defend himself. Each minute was sending Kird deeper, and instinctively he doubled one fist and drove it against the palm of his hand. At that instant the library door opened, and Mark Connought came into the room. He hurried toward them.

"I expected something like this," he said furiously. "Giving her the third degree, eh?"

He looked quickly at the bruise on Jane's cheek, and lifted his doubled fists. He swung once, but Kird pushed him away.

"Get out, or I'll throw you out."

"Kird!" cried Jane. "Why don't you be reasonable and let Mark help me? Tell him what you know and—"

"I'll do the talking," said Kird quickly. "And if he isn't out of here in one minute, I'll toss him out."

"But if he knew that—"

THE BLACKOUT MURDER

Kird put a hand over her mouth and turned toward Connought: "Outside, Mark! You've got a nice nose. Don't spoil it."

Jane forced Kird's hand from her mouth, pushed herself from the chair, and ran to the library door. Kird motioned Connought toward the living-room. He rang for the butler, and looked once again at the position of the chairs before Edgerlane's desk. If one of those men had killed Edgerlane, he must have had an accomplice to put the emergency lighting system out of order. If Kird could find the man who did that, he would quickly tie him to the killer.

"You rang, sir?" asked the butler.

"Yes, Morton," said Kird. "I suppose you know Mr. Edgerlane has been killed."

"Yes sir. I heard the guests talking in the other room."

"Did all the house lights go out at ten?"

"All of them, sir."

"What about the emergency system?"

"I've been waiting to tell you, sir," said the butler. "When the lights failed, one of the guards went to the power house near the garages. The engineer—man by the name of Jeff Barnes—was asleep. We tried to rouse him, but evidently he's been drugged."

Kird recalled the cars that had brought the guests. He questioned Morton about the drivers.

"All in the servants' quarters, sir," said the butler.

"I'll talk to them," said Kird.

SILENTLY he followed the butler across the terrace past the swimming-pool. The water was still and dark. They cut through a passage that led to a building that housed the servants, and Kird found the four chauffeurs gathered under the watchful eye of a guard. He pointed to the nearest.

"Who do you drive?" he asked.

"Senator Willman, sir."

"Where were you at ten o'clock tonight?"

"Right here. Playing poker."

"All of you?"

"Yes sir," said the driver. "We started a little game, and we been at it right along since we got here." He pointed to a tall, thin driver. "Walter, there—he went broke early, and took a walk around the grounds."

Kird looked at the butler, and Morton nodded agreement to this statement.

"Where did you go, Walter?" asked Kird.

"I drive for Colonel Times, sir," said Walter. "When my luck went bad, I walked out to the car to stand by for the Colonel."

"Why?"

"He doesn't like to be kept waiting when it's time to go."

"Were you near the power-plant?"

"Don't know where it is, sir."

Kird motioned to the butler. "Is the engineer still unconscious?"

"I'll see directly. He's in the front room. Mrs. Grandon, the housekeeper, is bathing his head. She's given him an emetic, sir."

"Bring him in, if he can talk."

THE butler left, and Kird questioned two of the guards. They had both seen Colonel Times' chauffeur on the grounds, but did not think he had been near the power-plant. Kird trusted the guards. All of them had been in Edgerlane's employ for years. The servants, too, were for the time above suspicion. Edgerlane had been careful in the selection of his help, but once they met with his approval, they became lesser members of his family. Each stood to lose by the publisher's death. Perhaps there would be small legacies. But these people were well paid, the work was easy and the surroundings pleasant.

The cook and her helper wept loudly. The maids sat quietly at a table, watching Kird and dabbing at their eyes with small handkerchiefs.

Morton came in with the engineer. He was supporting the man, and Barnes' eyes were but half open. He sat in a chair near Kird and rubbed his head.

"Drugged, I was—sure as I'm born," he said.

"With what, Jeff?" asked Kird.

Morton handed a partially emptied wine-bottle to Kird. It was a good brand, and Kird sniffed the neck. He showed it to Barnes.

"Drinking this?" he asked.

"Sure—a glass or two, no more," said Barnes. "Mr. Thompson brought it today. He's an inspector from the company that installed the electric plant."

"Ever give you any wine before?"

"Every time he comes."

"And you drank it each time?"

"Not all of it. I shared it with the others."

Barnes was in his late fifties; one of those workmen who take pride in their



stalled. We got good service on account of that."

"His company put in all the electrical work here?"

"Yeah—all of it."

Kird nodded. "How many helpers have you, Barnes?"

"Two. Mike and Eddy—they're sitting over near the window, there. Mike's a machinist, and Eddy's an electrician."

Kird called the electrician, a man in his thirties with the appearance of an efficient workman. He got up from his chair and stood facing Carey.

"I don't know anything about all this," he said. "The plant was in good order this afternoon. All of it."

"Did you have any of the wine?"

"No. Don't touch the stuff. Jeff offered it to me, but I don't drink. Not a drop!"

"You've got a lot of things to explain," he said. "Start talking!"

appearance. His hair had been neatly brushed, and traces of the comb were still visible. His overalls had been scrubbed white, and his shoes were neat. Not the drinking type—Edgerlane would not have stood for that. But the publisher did not mind if his servants enjoyed themselves. In fact, he always provided wine for their table.

Kird handed the bottle to the butler. "There's a chemist in Farmingdale—twenty minutes' drive. Phone him. Get him out of bed and tell him I want an analysis of this wine. Send a guard with it, Morton."

"Yes sir," said the butler.

He left with the wine, and Kird turned again to the engineer: "What company installed that plant, Jeff?"

"The Winsdale outfit, sir."

"Winsdale, eh? Isn't Mr. Connought the president of that concern?"

"Sure he is," said Barnes. "He supervised the job for us when it was in-

His tone was argumentative, and Kird stepped closer to him. "You checked the plant this afternoon?"

"Yeah."

"Nothing wrong, then?"

"No."

"Why didn't it work at ten o'clock?"

"Ask Jeff. He's the boss."

"Tough, eh?" said Kird.

"Not tough," said the electrician.

"Just smart. I know all about you guys. You get a man to talk, and then make a sap out of him. But it don't go with me. I'm a union man, and I know my rights."

"What union?" asked Kird quickly.

"A good union. Any objections?"

"None at all," said Kird. "Long as you don't belong to Plover's outfit, I'm satisfied."

"Oh, yeah? What's wrong with Sam Plover, I'd like to know?"

"Not a thing," replied Kird.

He waited for Morton to return, instructed him to keep all of the servants

in their quarters and provide sleeping accommodations for the chauffeurs. He walked back to the house. Colonel Times and Senator Willman were seated near one of the windows. The Senator was in violent disagreement with Times; and Plover was glancing through a magazine, while Connought stood talking with Jane near the door to the pool.

WHEN Kird entered, Connought hurried toward him.

"Look here, Carey," he said. "I'm just as anxious as you to clear this thing up quickly. Let me make one phone-call, and I think I can tell you something interesting."

"Go ahead," said Kird. "But I don't want anyone else to know of Edgerlane's death until I give the word. Whatever you say will be heard by the house operator, and she'll tell me."

Connought waited until Kird had given instructions to the operator and then called his number. Kird drew a chair near to Sam Plover's and spoke quietly to the labor leader.

"I see you've got a man here at Deepwood," he said. "I'm not sure, but I think we have his picture and prints at police headquarters."

"Sure you have," said Plover. "I asked Edgerlane to give him the job. An electrician—made one mistake and admits it. He's been here three years, Carey. What about it?"

"Suppose you guess," said Kird. He saw Connought coming toward him.

"I've just been talking with a friend of mine in the Air Service," said Connought. "He tells me the blackout was suggested to the War Department by Senator Willman. Practically jammed the idea down their throats in spite of protests."

"And that makes me a murderer?" cried the Senator. "Of all the confounded nonsense—"

"Don't get excited, Senator," said Times quietly. "I've been after the War Department for months on the same thing. In fact, I think it was my protests that made them try out the air defenses."

"Oh, you want credit for that, eh?" said Willman.

Connought's laugh was short. "Damn' funny the blackout was scheduled for this particular night!"

The butler came into the room and motioned to Kird. When they were apart from the others he whispered: "The

chemist phoned and said a quick preliminary test suggested that there was a harmless drug in the wine, sir. He said a complete analysis would require considerable time."

"Thanks, Morton," said Kird. He turned to Connought. "I don't like to break down your theory, Connought. But the engineer in charge of the electrical plant was given a bottle of drugged wine by one of your inspectors today. Any idea why that was done?"

"Drugged wine?" said Mark. "You're crazy!"

Sam Plover tossed aside his magazine and stood up. He yawned and stretched, and grinned at Kird.

"Nice work, Mr. Prosecutor," he said. "I guess that lets us out."

Senator Willman was beaming. "Splendid work! Pinned it right on Connought—and him trying to accuse me. Congratulations, Mr. Carey. I understand now why Mr. Edgerlane thought so highly of you."

Colonel Times was walking toward the front door. "Mind if my chauffeur drives me home now, Carey? It's getting late."

"Sit down," said Kird. "When Connought gives me the answers, you can all go home. Not till then."

"You're out of your mind," said Connought. "I know nothing about the wine—nothing at all. And suppose my inspector did leave it? Does that mean the drug was in the bottle? Couldn't some one here have done it?"

"Sure," laughed Plover. "I came out this afternoon and did it." He turned to Kird. "Lock him up, Carey. He's the man."

KIRD looked at Plover. "That electrician of yours could have done it this afternoon." He turned to Times. "And your chauffeur isn't in the clear, Colonel. I'm not exactly a pal of Connought's, but there might be some truth in what he said."

"There might be, but I doubt it," said Times. "I've tried to keep an open mind, but the evidence points directly to Connought."

"And the girl," said Senator Willman. "Don't forget her. She and Connought are working together. If you dig deep enough, Carey, you'll find they have a good reason for that murder."

"They were both in a good position to reach Edgerlane," said Plover thoughtfully. He looked toward the library. "Why not go through the killing again?"

If it proves up, you can make your charge and we can go home."

Kird nodded, and motioned to Jane. "Will you come into the library and take the same place you had at ten o'clock, Jane?"

"Certainly," she said. Connought lifted a hand in protest, but Jane shook her head. "There's no use arguing, Mark."

"But it's ridiculous," said Connought. He looked at Kird, seemed about to say something, but shrugged instead. "Very well. We'll try it."

He followed Jane into the library and seated himself in the chair to the right of the semicircle. Jane walked to the corner and stood beside the portable typewriter stand. Colonel Times sat next to Mark, then Plover and Willman. Kird went to the left end of the row and stood before the chair.

"Walk to the desk, Jane," he said.

She stepped away from the typewriter and moved quickly to a place to the right of the desk. Kird walked toward the windows as though to pull back the drapes, then turned and motioned to Connought.

"Get up and go to the desk."

CONNUGHT stood, looked doubtfully about and went to Edgerlane's desk. Jane blocked his way, but after a quick glance at Kird, she stepped aside. Mark passed her, turned and came back to his chair. Sam Plover nodded thoughtfully and lifted his hands.

"That's the way it happened," he said. "Nothing to it."

Kird motioned to Times: "You next, Colonel."

Times smiled and stood up. His chair was on a direct line with the corner of the desk and a few steps took him to Jane's side. He waited but she did not move.

"I beg your pardon," he said. "I can't pass unless you step aside."

"Push her out of the way," called Kird.

Colonel Times took Jane by the elbow and moved her aside. He stepped past the desk, turned and came back to his chair. Before he was seated, Plover had started toward the publisher's desk. He paused, looked at Kird and asked: "Which side shall I take—left or right?"

"Suit yourself," said Kird.

Plover walked to the left, away from Jane. In this way he reached the spot where Edgerlane had been in less time

than the Colonel had required. He went through the motions of stabbing a man, then hurried back to his chair.

"Try it, Senator," said Kird.

Willman mumbled, "Ridiculous!" He went directly to the left side of the desk, paused and then returned to his chair.

"Will you do it again, Senator?" asked Kird. "This time go to the right side, push Miss Marleigh aside and circle the desk."

Willman protested, but did as he was told. When he had finished, Kird walked slowly to the windows and looked into the night. Connought was a natural. So was Colonel Times. Either could have killed Edgerlane and returned to his chair before Kird opened the draperies. Plover's chance wasn't quite so good. Neither was Willman's. Still, Kird was willing to bet any man in the room could have done the job. . . .

Senator Willman started another of his innumerable demands, and Plover was already on his way to the living-room. Kird dismissed the others and went to the desk. When they were alone, Jane handed him a sealed envelope.

"This was with the other papers," she said. "I saw it while I was standing here."

It was addressed to Kird, and he opened the flap. Inside was a single sheet of paper with a neatly typed message. It read:

"When you see this, Kird, I will no longer be with you. Sorry to leave so abruptly, but it was necessary. As you know, I have long been convinced one of these four men is behind the rackets and is planning to become dictator. My death proves it. He must of necessity be a daring adventurer. One who would not overlook any opportunity to prevent his disclosure. So I have provided him with a numbered gun, and darkness in which to work. Ballistics will tie the bullets to the proper gun. Of course, I may fail; but I am convinced you can find and convict the murderer. As for the evidence against Tarrio's killer—that was a bluff. I think Hensdrel is the man, but I have no proof. I am old and tired, Kird. And I am satisfied to die, if my death will destroy the threat to our country. Good luck, son—this should make you governor."

Beneath was a list of numbers and the name of each guest, and the note was signed with a scrawl Kird had seen often. He handed the note to Jane and watched her eyes fill with tears as she read it.

THE BLACKOUT MURDER

"Ever see that before?" he asked.

"No."

"You didn't type it for him?"

"No."

"Is that his signature?"

"I think so."

"Was he in the habit of typing his own letters—any of them?"

"Not for the past few years," said Jane. "I answered and signed all of the unimportant mail without showing it to him. He dictated answers for the rest."

"You signed his mail—like that?" Kird pointed to the scrawled signature on the bottom of the note.

"Yes. It was an easy signature—anyone could do it with a little practice."

KIRD whistled. As a prosecuting attorney he was constantly in search of truth, from reluctant witnesses; but now he would have welcomed a lie. Anything but Jane's admission she could duplicate Edgerlane's signature. He tried again.

"Look at this." He folded the paper and pointed to the name. "That isn't like yours—you could swear it isn't!"

Jane shook her head. "It could be mine, even though it isn't."

"Then you could have written and signed this note, placed it on the desk when you reached for the paper-knife to provide yourself with an alibi. You benefit by Edgerlane's death—become the owner of a valuable estate. You quarreled with him today, and he threatened to cut you out of his will. You were—"

"How can you say that?" she cried.

He was standing as though in court, holding the letter and hammering at a witness.

"The butler heard you quarreling. With a little help, he could recall other quarrels. Sure—he's heard Edgerlane threaten to take you out of his will. He remembers—I could make him remember. So could any district attorney."

Jane's cheeks had lost their color. She faced Kird, but his eyes took no notice of her. They were looking up toward a girl on the witness-stand. A dozen jurors were listening intently to a district attorney's questions. A defense lawyer was howling objections that a judge was overruling. The case was being sewn up with threads of circumstantial evidence. It was a sure shot. Half the jurors were wondering how a beautiful girl could do such a thing. The other half didn't care.

They were waiting for the summations—waiting to vote guilty on the first ballot and go home. . . .

"Why did you find this note?" he said sharply. "Why were you in the room? Why the devil didn't you go to the city—do as you were told and get out?"

Jane took a step backward. Her hands went up as though to stop Kird's barrage of questions. She turned, hurried across the room and through the doorway. Kird wanted to tell her he had been standing in the place of the district attorney who would try the case. But there was no opportunity. Senator Willman was coming toward him, and the portly Senator was smiling.

"Looks as though you've got a confession from that girl," he said. "Didn't take you long to break her down. A nice combination—Jane Marleigh and Mark Connought. Congratulations, Mr. Carey."

"Save 'em," said Kird. "Maybe it's time you got to bed, Senator. We're all staying at Deepwood tonight."

"That's absurd," said Willman. "No need for it. You've got your murderers. Besides, I have an important engagement for tomorrow afternoon—a political meeting with two men."

"Bring them out here," said Kird. He walked into the library and rang for the butler.

Colonel Times looked up inquiringly. "You mean we can't leave?"

"Right," said Kird. "You stay."

THE Colonel was irritable. "You may be one of the few who don't know it, Mr. Carey," he said, "but twenty million people will be waiting for my broadcast tomorrow morning."

"Twenty million," laughed Plover. "Why not make it two hundred million and take in the whole continent?"

"Twenty million, Mr. Plover," said Times. "That program is a coast-to-coast hook-up. There are recordings made to cover dozens of outlying stations. And it may interest you to know I have one of the highest ratings of any speaker on the air."

"Who cares?" said Plover. He wagged the stem of his pipe at Kird. "I'm supposed to be in Cleveland Monday morning. How am I to get there if you keep us at Deepwood?"

"I don't want to be unreasonable, Plover," said Kird. "You're staying tonight, but I'll have a commercial plane stand by to take you to Cleveland the minute this thing breaks."



"For the last six hours I've been wanting to sock some one," Kird said.

"You'll bring one here to the estate?"

"Yes, I'll order it tonight and have it here in the morning." Kird turned to Times. "As for you, Colonel, if the broadcasting company will put in a wire, you can make your speech right here at Deepwood."

"I suppose that's possible," said Times. "Will you arrange the details?"

"Gladly," said Kird. "Make a note of what you want, and Morton will show you all to your rooms."

He took the memorandum written by the Colonel, instructed Morton to place the guests in adjoining rooms and went to the phone. The radio station agreed to install a microphone early in the morning, and Kird called the airport. A plane would be at Deepwood before ten with a pilot standing by. The Senator's friends could be notified in the morning. With these duties attended to, Kird reviewed the things he had learned since ten o'clock: Jane was on the spot. No doubt of that. Connought was in better shape, because of the note. Kird believed the note to be genuine, and that meant Edgerlane had used a harmless drug to knock out old Jeff Barnes. Reasonable enough. The murderer would have been more apt to kill him. Edgerlane had no wish to harm an employee.

As for the others, there wasn't enough to hold them legally, and strong-arm methods couldn't go on forever. Still,

there was one card Kird could play before morning. One of these men wanted to be dictator. Jimmy Hensdrel knew the answer. Obviously Hensdrel was the man Kird wanted. If he could be made to talk—fine. If not, perhaps one of the four would try to get Hensdrel. Too bad for Hensdrel, thought Kird. He reached for the phone.

"Get me the home of Sheriff Dudley," he said to the operator. "Keep ringing until you get him."

SHORTLY after, Dudley's voice came over the wire, sleepy and indignant. "Yeah—who wants me?"

"This is Kird Carey. I want Jimmy Hensdrel brought here to Deepwood."

"When—tonight?"

"Right now. Send him up here under guard, and tell the driver to make time. Don't ask questions, Sheriff—get Hensdrel here in a hurry."

He hung up, and climbed the stairs to the second floor. Morton was there, and the butler told him Plover had been placed in a suite toward the left end of the hall; Senator Willman was to Plover's right, then Colonel Times, and next to him Mark Connought. These guest-rooms were to the left of the stairwell;

Kird always used a room at the opposite end of the hall, where Edgerlane and Jane had occupied adjoining suites.

He thanked Morton, told him not to retire, and knocked upon the Colonel's door. When it opened, a burst of swing music poured into the hall, and behind it came Times in trousers and shirt-sleeves.

"Not a bad radio in here," he said. "I've been trying some of the distant stations, and the reception is perfect."

"So I notice," said Kird. "Just wanted to let you know the mike will be installed in the morning."

"Oh, fine!" said Times. "Thanks very much, Carey."

The Senator's door opened, and Willman peered into the hall.

"Look here, Times!" he howled. "Can't you tune down that confounded radio? I should think you'd have more decency than to play it at all."

"Sorry, Senator," said Times. "I wasn't after music. Merely trying the reception. I like to know of the con-



ditions throughout the country before a broadcast."

"Rubbish!" said Willman. "Go to bed and stop that noise."

Plover had stepped into the hall too. "That's right, Colonel. We'd like a little silence up here tonight."

Colonel Times smiled. "My apologies, Mr. Plover. I thought possibly your conscience would keep you awake. I'll turn off the radio immediately."

Kird waited until the discussion had stopped, then went past the stairwell and knocked upon Jane's door.

But there was no answer. Kird went down to the living-room. The house was quiet, but the lights were burning on the lower floor. He looked through the open doors. Green trees and a pattern of shrubbery extended to the water's edge in places. The lights from the bedrooms made yellow patches on the surface, and he watched them wink out one after another. Then he froze.

There was some one in the billiard-room. Kird heard the noise—faint but definite in the stillness of the house. He stepped to the door and turned the knob. It was locked.

"That you, Morton?" he asked.

NO voice answered, but Kird heard quick footsteps. He tried the knob again, then reached into his pocket for his gun. With customary directness he emptied a clip of shells into the lock. The sound of the shots bucketed about the tall room, echoed over the swimming-pool and drifted off into the night. Kird braced his feet and pushed. The door swung back, and light from the living-room splashed across the dark floor.

Kird touched a switch. There was no one in the room. But a door that led to the pool terrace was opened and moving slightly. Kird ran across the room. He stepped onto the terrace and looked about. No one in sight. He glanced at

the water in the star-shaped pool. There were ripples on the surface—small curving waves that might have been caused if something the size of a gun had been dropped into the water.

Kird doubled back through the billiard-room, crossed the hall and raced up the stairs. He had taken the turn to the right, and Jane's door was close. He pounded on the panels. Other doors were opening along the hall. The shots had disturbed the entire household, and the guests came running toward him.

"What goes on here?" asked Colonel Times. He was in pajamas and robe. His gun was in his hand. Kird ignored him.

"What are you doing, Carey?" yelled Connought. He pushed past the Colonel and lifted his gun.

KIRD was using the butt of his empty automatic to batter an opening in a panel near the lock. A guard offered his rifle. Then the butler arrived and used his pass-key. Kird stepped into the room touched the wall switch and glanced about. The room was empty, and he ran to the bath. No one there.

"Where's Jane?" asked Connought. He grabbed Kird's arm. "What have you done with her? Where is she?"

Senator Willman pointed across the stair-rail toward the lower floor. "Who did that shooting, Carey? Was it you?"

"Just opening a door," said Kird. He noticed Jane's bed had not been used, though the spread was off and the upper sheet folded back. He motioned to the butler. "Get the housekeeper and maids, Morton. Ask if they've seen Miss Marleigh. If not, question the men at the gates, then detail six guards to search the estate."

"It won't be easy to find Miss Marleigh if she is hiding," said Morton.

"Why should she be hiding?"

Morton was astonished. "I don't know, sir. Merely a suggestion."

"She isn't hiding," said Connought quickly. "Something's happened to her—she's been taken away to keep her from talking."

"Talking about what?" asked Kird.

"You can answer that. You spoke with her alone in the library."

"So what?"

"There was a bruise on her cheek," said Connought. "Maybe she threatened to talk—tell us something you didn't want known. So Carey of the gangster squad slugged her and—"

"I demand the authorities be told of this!" cried Willman. "I don't intend to stand for any strong-arm methods—not at all!"

"Did you hit Miss Marleigh, Carey?" asked Plover. He was leaning against the stair-rail, watching Kird closely.

"No," said Kird. He stepped into the hall. "But I'm ready to start throwing a few punches now!" He pointed to Willman's room, and motioned to the Senator. "Back in your kennel, Senator. Keep the gun handy, and use it if anyone comes in."

"Don't be a fool, Carey!" said Willman. "I can't use a gun. Never shot one in my life."

Kird wasn't listening. He faced Plover: "You too—go to bed and keep your gun handy." He glanced at Times, but the Colonel merely shrugged and smiled. Kird's voice was sharp. "Anything funny about this, Colonel?"

"I find it amusing," said Times. "This is my first opportunity to watch a combination detective and special prosecutor at work. You've given dozens of orders, Mr. Carey, and you've threatened to punch everyone's jaw. But you know less now than you did at ten o'clock this evening."

Kird couldn't find an answer. He saw the Colonel's door close, and turned to find Sam Plover watching him with a semi-amused scowl.

"Bearing down on you, eh, Carey?" said the labor leader. "He'll do worse when he gets on the air tomorrow. Better not let him make that broadcast."

"I agree to that," said Willman quickly. "I don't want my name mentioned."

"He won't talk about this," Kird promised. He lifted a hand to stop further protest by Willman. "Good night, Senator. Remember what I said about the gun."

PLOVER and Willman went to their rooms. Kird stood looking at the row of closed doors. Behind one was a murderer. And Times was right—no argument there: Kird was no closer to a solution than ever. He could hold these men here for a day—possibly two days. But they were far too important to be cooped up on a Long Island estate beyond that period. Despite his threats of investigations, he would have to release them. The newspapers would start to ask questions. Too, Kird would have to notify the coroner in the morning—he should have called him before this.

THE BLACKOUT MURDER

It was a mess, and it didn't help his frame of mind to see Connought step from his room, fully dressed and swinging a gun.

"Where are you going?" asked Kird.

"To look for Jane. Any objections?"

"None at all," said Kird. "And if a guard happens to wing you while you're prowling around, so much the better."

"I'm not worried about the guards," said Connought. He looked at the empty gun in Kird's hand. "Not worried about you, either."

HE went down the stairs, and Kird followed to the door of the swimming-pool terrace. When Connought had stepped out into the darkness, Kird stood for a time watching the smooth water of the pool. It had been rippled when he last looked at its surface; something had been dropped into it. The pool could be drained, of course, but Kird decided against it. It was a temporary hiding-place at best, and whoever had used it, might try to recover the thing that had been hidden. When that happened, some one was going to get hurt.

Kird's gun was empty, but there was an assortment of shells in the library cabinet. He opened a drawer, found a box and filled the clip of his automatic. Then he looked at the marks he had made on the light green rug—blue circles that showed the position of each guest when Edgerlane had been killed.

Jane had been less than three feet from the publisher. Without question, she could have done it. He could take Times, Willman and Plover out with little trouble. Too far from their chairs—hardly enough time, unless the man was an athlete.

But Connought had been close—close enough to help Jane. And they were friends. Perhaps Jane wanted to marry Connought, and Edgerlane had been against it. Connought couldn't afford to anger the publisher. Had to play ball with him. But if Jane were mentioned in the will—oh, it was easy! Made to order. Front-page stuff, too. A case any prosecutor would jump at. Beautiful secretary kills her aged employer in order to marry his friend. Front-page pictures. Coast-to-coast publicity for a district attorney. Only a fool would miff this one. And the county prosecutor—Thomas Keldrick—was no fool. He was young and clever, and eager for a chance.

There were only two things wrong with the entire set-up: Kird loved Jane.

And he knew Jane had not killed Edgerlane. But that wasn't proof. It wouldn't help Jane. Keldrick would tag her with a murder charge five minutes after he learned how Edgerlane had been killed. Tag her and make it stick!

Morton stepped into the library and said Sheriff Dudley's men were outside with Hensdrel. Kird closed the library doors behind him and walked to a chair near the table in the living-room.

"Send Hensdrel in," he said. "Take Dudley's men to the servants' quarters and keep them there."

"All night, sir?"

"What's left of it—and tomorrow too."

The butler left, and a moment later Hensdrel came into the huge living-room. Jimmy Hensdrel had learned his politics in the hard school that is New York's lower East Side—knew all the answers and most of the questions. He was suave when suavity was needed, hard when it was smart to be tough. He was a thief, and Kird knew it. So did a thousand others. But they couldn't prove it; and until recently Kird couldn't either. Now he had Hensdrel on a half-dozen charges that would stand up in court. If Jane wasn't to go before a district attorney in two days, Kird had to make Hensdrel talk now.

He nodded to the politician, and motioned to a chair. "Lo, Jimmy. Sorry to get you out of bed at this hour. Like something to drink?"

BUT Hensdrel's grin was questioning. He was wary as a wolf at a well-covered trap. He said to the butler: "Get me a cup of black coffee. Make it two cups, and tell the stenographer at the dictaphone Mr. Hensdrel is here."

Morton looked vaguely at Kird. "The stenographer at—"

"Get the coffee, Morton," said Kird. He pushed a box of cigars across the table. "No dictaphone, Jimmy. Everything is off the record tonight."

Hensdrel sat down and pulled at his trouser-legs to keep the creases. "Off the record, eh?" He bit through the tip of a cigar, held a flame to it and watched the smoke. "Good enough, Carey. Some people wouldn't trust you, but I'm different. Besides, I've been checking on you lately."

"Ever catch me lying?"

"No."

"Then you'll know I'm not kidding when I tell you I intend to send you up for murder."

"Whose?"

"Joe Tarrio."

"You can prove it in court?"

"You'll be the first one to know it when I do."

"Stop sparring," said Hensdrel. "I asked a question."

"I'm asking the questions tonight."

"In other words, you're bluffing."

"Stick around and find out," said Kird. He waited until Morton had placed two cups of black coffee at Hensdrel's elbow. When the butler left the room, Kird pointed a finger at the politician. "You killed Tarrio, and it was a premeditated job. First-degree stuff that will bring you the chair. Tarrio was a rat and probably deserved what he got, so I'm willing to make a deal."

"Say it, Carey."

"You're working for a boss, Jimmy."

"So are you, feller. Edgerlane gives you orders. Probably told you to bring me here tonight." He glanced toward the stairs. "Is he going to sit in later?"

"Not this evening."

"Give him my best."

"I'm talking about Tarrio," said Kird. "I'll break that charge down to third degree—might even forget it."

"If?"

"If you help me get your boss."

Hensdrel sipped the coffee, put down the cup and grinned at Kird. "What's his name? I mean this boss of mine—what do they call him?"

KIRD tried a long shot. "In a few months he expects everyone to call him Duce—or Fuehrer—or Commissar. Maybe he'll settle for Emperor, or let us call him Mister Big."

"Keep talking," said Hensdrel slowly.

"He expects to run things in America, and he's got a heavy war-chest. Money he's made in the rackets. Money you've helped him make, Hensdrel. He's promised you a soft spot for your work, and protection if you slip up."

"Say," said Hensdrel wisely. "You know all the answers, don't you, Carey?"

"Does it sound like that?"

"Almost," said Hensdrel. "If you only knew his name, you'd be perfect."

"But you don't think I know it?"

Hensdrel spread his hands. "I wouldn't be here if you did."

"I said I wanted to make a deal."

"No dice, Carey. We can both save time if we stop talking. You know I'm over seven, and I figure you to be smart. Let's forget the whole thing."

"You're sure I don't know who he is?"

"Positive."

"Then you're going to be surprised to have breakfast with him in the morning. He's right here in Deepwood."

Hensdrel looked closely at Kird. "Don't spoil that record, Carey. You've never been caught in a lie."

"He's right here at Deepwood," said Kird again. "But we won't mention his name just now."

"And you're out to get him?"

"Right."

"And you're holding Tarrio over my head to make me play on your side?"

"Right again."

HENSIREL shook his head. "It won't work, Carey. If I admit for the sake of argument there is such a man,—a man who intends to be dictator,—then I don't have to worry about you or Tarrio. I don't even have to worry about these charges you've tagged me with today. When this man takes over, I'll toss you and your charges into a concentration-camp, Carey."

"You're talking like a chump—not like Jimmy Hensdrel the smart guy," said Kird. "A dictator's chances in this country are about—"

"The same as they were in Germany after the war," said Hensdrel. "I know it can't happen here, Carey. And eighty million Germans would have said the same thing before Hitler. But the politicians knew, and so do I."

"Maybe you're right, Jimmy," said Kird. His voice was quiet, but his mind was spinning. Edgerlane had been correct. There was such a man, and Hensdrel worked for him. Jimmy Hensdrel the smart guy. Hensdrel the politician. He expected a dictator in America. Kird leaned against the table-edge: "Yes, Jimmy, you may be right. But there's something you haven't heard, and it may change your mind."

"Say it."

"Your boss is in trouble—plenty of trouble. I think I'm going to send him to jail tomorrow."

"You think?"

"To keep the record straight," said Carey, "let's say I *expect* to send him to jail tomorrow. If I do, I won't need your help, Jimmy. And you'll burn for Tarrio's death."

Hensdrel emptied one coffee-cup. He twisted the cigar slowly between his fingers. Kird didn't hurry him. He wanted Hensdrel to think. He leaned

"This is the first sensible thing we've done tonight," said Jane. "Did I hurt your finger when I bit it?"



back in his chair and traced a pattern on the table-top with his forefinger—an obvious design of the electric chair. Then he stopped drawing and leaned forward.

"We were talking about a deal," said Kird. "Tonight you have something to sell, Jimmy. You've got a buyer, and the price is a good one. Tomorrow the set-up may be different. I won't need you. And you'll be on your way to the chair."

"Can you imagine that?" grinned Hensdrel.

"Sure I can," said Kird. "There's a short row of cells, and the one near the green door is always empty until it's time for a man to take the last walk. They'll move you into that cell for a haircut, Jimmy. They'll slit your pant-legs and send in a priest. They'll offer you a meal you don't want. Then, with the priest at your side, you'll walk into the white room and see the chair. It's not good to see, even when you're a witness to an execution. When you have to sit in it—"

"And so Little Red Riding-Hood ate up the bad wolf and saved her grandma," said Hensdrel quietly. He pushed the coffee-cups away, rested an elbow on the table. "Thanks for the picture, Carey. But I don't scare worth a damn."

Kird stood up. "Good night, Jimmy. The butler will show you to a room on the next floor. I'd advise you to keep your doors and windows locked."

"Not a chance," said Hensdrel. "I'm going back to the Tombs. I like it in jail."

"Not tonight. You're going to stay here."

"I get it," said Hensdrel. "I'm stuck, and you're boss. But I can say plenty when I get into court, Carey."

"Suppose you never get into court?"

"What do you mean?"

"That you better lock your doors and windows tonight," said Kird. He rang for the butler. When Morton came into the room, Kird told him to put Hensdrel in the room at the left end of the hall. He waved pleasantly to the politician. "Nice dreams, Jimmy. I wonder if a guy really feels that first jolt when it hits him? Wonder if it hurts much to die?"

He walked out onto the swimming-pool terrace while Morton conducted Hensdrel up the wide stairs to the bedroom floor. Hensdrel said nothing. He knew when to talk, and he knew when to keep his mouth shut. Kird might be bluffing. Or he might not be. . . .

Kird stood at the edge of the pool, and soon the first of the guards came to report.

"She's not in Deepwood, sir," he said. "We've searched everywhere within the fence, and Miss Marleigh isn't here."

"Did you cover the golf-course?"

"Some of the men are there now, sir."

"And the house?"

"It's been thoroughly searched."

"Keep after her," said Kird. "She couldn't get past the gates. Tell the men to look again and report to Morton."

The guard nodded, and walked across the pool gardens toward the golf-course. Kird went quietly up the stairs and stepped into Jane's room. He closed the door and touched a wall-switch. Then he started a systematic search. Bureau, vanity, dresser and closets came first. He found everything in order; and Jane's traveling-bags were stored empty at the rear of one closet. He put out the bedroom light and went into the bath. There was a pungent, sharp odor that came from the tub. He found the wall-switch and looked behind the shower curtain.

Overtaken in the bottom of the sunken tub were a half-dozen bottles and small cans. He lifted one and glanced at the label. Cleaning-fluid. He looked at another. Spot-remover. Another was for ink-stains. He scratched his head and wondered if Jane had gone mad. Then he put out the light, and crossed to the bedroom. It was dark and quiet.

A moment later he heard a footstep on the balcony that overlooked the pool. Tall French windows gave access to this balcony, and Kird moved quietly across the room to stand beside them. He looked into the night, and saw the outlines of a crouching figure. It moved closer. Kird took the gun from his pocket. The window opened quietly. He grabbed with his left hand and started a swing with his right.

"Oh—*don't!*" It was Jane's voice.

KIRD pulled her into the room and closed the window. He put away his gun, but held the lapels of her coat.

"You've got a lot of things to explain," he said quietly. "Start talking."

"Put on the light and stop dragging me apart."

"Never mind the light," said Kird. He let go of the dark coat and stepped back a pace. "Were you in the billiard-room an hour ago?"

"Yes."

"That helps," said Kird. "Then we'll start at the end and work forward. What's the idea of the empty cleaning-fluid cans?"

Jane walked to the bed and sat down. "Stop shouting, and I'll tell you the whole thing."

Kird sat beside her. "I'm listening."

"It's simply an idea of my own," she said. "I told you some one knocked me aside to get to Mr. Edgerlane—showed you the bruise on my cheek."

"So?"

"Later, when you acted like a stubborn idiot, I came to my room and—"

"I didn't act like a stubborn idiot."

"OH, Kird, do let me talk," she said. Her hand was on his arm, and she shook it. "When I looked into the mirror, I saw the lip-rouge had been smeared at the corner of my mouth. It's a deep color and stains everything it touches. Naturally I figured it must be on the murderer's shirt-sleeve—on the cuff. You remember Mr. Edgerlane told the men to remove their coats, and—"

"Why didn't you tell me?" said Kird quickly.

"You didn't give me a chance. You were acting like an idiot."

"Idiot, your eye!" he snapped. "You stay right here while I rouse out the others. When I get the shirt with the lip-rouge, I've got the man I want!"

"Settle down, Kird," she urged. Both hands were tight upon his forearm, and she leaned close to him. "One smudge of lip-rouge won't get you a conviction. Each man in the room was close to me. Any one of them could claim it was an accident—that his cuff had rubbed against my face. Or that I had deliberately smeared his shirt with lipstick. But if no one mentions the stain, he's sure to try to remove it."

"It doesn't add up," said Kird.

"It does! He'll ask the maid to bring him some cleaning-fluid. He's sure to. So I had the housekeeper round up all the bottles and cans and bring them to me."

"Why?"

"Well, French chalk is a perfect remover for lip-rouge. He'll know this, and—"

"Who will?"

"The murderer."

Kird shook his head. "How will he know about French chalk? He's a man. Why, I'd never heard of the stuff."

"But he's clever, Kird," said Jane quickly. She took her hands from his arm and leaned back. "He's proved he's a good deal smarter than you."

"Never mind the wise-cracks. Keep talking."

"He'll know there is always chalk in a billiard-room, and he'll try to get some."

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At least, I figured he would. So I hid there waiting for him. Then you heard me, and started acting like a crazy man—shooting through the door.”

“I was only shooting the lock off.”

“I didn’t know that,” she said. “But even if I had, I didn’t want you to catch me there. So I gathered up all the chalk and threw it into the pool.”

“That’s that!” said Kird disgustedly. “I saw the ripples on the water and thought I had something, but you—” He caught her shoulders and shook them. “Jane, I hate to admit it, but you’ve been acting like a girl scout. Why didn’t you say you were in the billiard-room—or stay there?”

“Because you’d have demanded an explanation in front of everyone. I didn’t want the murderer to know I was laying a trap.”

“You mean laying an egg.”

“Is that so?” She pushed him away from her. “I try to use a few brains, and you call it laying an egg. But do you know who killed Mr. Edgerlane?”

“I’ll never find him if I have to chase you and dive for French chalk. All that stuff is swell in the movies. I like to read it when I’m not busy. But Jane—if you’d served in the Police Department, you’d know better.”

“You mean I’d know enough not to use my head?”

“That’s right. You’d learn to use your fists instead!”

“That doesn’t make sense, Kird.”

“Of course not. But it gets convictions.” He shook a fist under her nose to emphasize the point. “Scientific hoopla and clever deductions—the cigarette ash on the rug or the lip-rouge on a guy’s cuff—it’s all the same. It’s hogwash. It never sent a man to the chair, Jane.”

“But your strong-arm methods will?”

“Absolutely. There’s only one way to work—a stool pigeon gives you a tip that brings in a few suspects. You take each suspect into a nice quiet room and beat his ears off unless he talks. They’re all crooks and deserve a beating, and finally one of them talks. Now in this case, we’ve got four suspects. Each of them in need of a workout, and—”

JANE stood up. In the darkness of the room she faced Kird, and her voice was sharp. “If you try that, you’ll spoil everything!”

“Not so loud,” said Kird. “You’ll wake up my suspects.”

“I’ll talk as loudly as I want!”

“You’ll shut up,” said Kird quietly. He reached forward and put one hand over her mouth. His right arm went about her waist, and he held her firmly while she struggled. “Not very scientific, but it keeps you from waking the guests, Jane. Just strong-arm stuff.”

She bit his hand. When she tried to break away from his arm, he drew her closer and bent toward her. His hand left her mouth, and he kissed her.

PERHAPS because it was a night filled with many emotions, Jane kissed back. She leaned against him, and Kird’s arm drew her closer. Her head rested against his shoulder, and he rubbed the tip of her ear with his cheek.

“Crazy, aren’t we?” he said slowly.

“This is the first sensible thing you’ve done tonight,” said Jane. “Did I hurt your finger when I bit it?”

Kird ruffled her hair and lifted her chin with one of his wide hands. He kissed her again just as the bedroom door opened. Connought was in the hall. The light from a wall fixture framed him as a black silhouette, and for a moment he stood without speaking.

“Nice work, Carey,” he said at length. “I see you’ve cleared one of the suspects. It must be handy to be a detective.”

“Mark!” cried Jane. “You don’t mean that—you couldn’t!”

He laughed at her. “Sorry to have come in without knocking, Jane. I should have known better. But I heard voices in your room—hardly expected to find you here with Carey.”

“And you’re putting two and two together?” asked Kird.

“Oh, there isn’t much to add up,” said Connought. He looked casually at the unlighted fixtures and the closed windows. “You should have locked the door, though.”

Kird stepped toward him. “For the last six hours I’ve been wanting to sock some one,” he said. His fist caught Connought’s jaw. Mark was going away, but the punch spun him into the hall and dropped him. “Thanks for the break,” said Kird.

He moved in to finish the work as Connought got up, but Jane grabbed his arm.

“Come out of it, Kird!” she said quickly. “This can’t get you anything but trouble.”

The door of Times’ room opened, and the Colonel stepped into the hall. The

gun in his hand was held ready, and he looked first at Connought, then at Jane and Kird.

"Have you found your murderer, Carey?" he asked.

Senator Willman came next; and behind him Sam Plover in pajamas and slippers. They both started to ask questions, but Connought spoke first. He was holding one hand to his jaw.

"I'd advise one of you men to lock this maniac in a room," he said. "I caught him in Miss Marleigh's room, and he hit me."

"But not hard enough," said Kird. He started forward.

"Please!" said Jane. She turned to Colonel Times. "It's just a mistake—really it is. Kird will explain everything in the morning."

"I'll bet he will," said an amused voice from the end of the hall. "Good evening, gentlemen."

Sam Plover was the first to turn. "Hensdrel!" he said. "What the devil are you doing here?"

"Same to you, Plover!" said Hensdrel. "And you too, Senator." He walked slowly toward the group. "Quite a gathering, I'd say. Mark Connought and Colonel Times too—yes, quite a party."

"What is this man doing at Deepwood?" yelled the Senator. "Am I expected to sleep under the same roof with a murderer?"

"Two murderers," said Kird. "Hensdrel is in good company. He killed a man, and so did one of you."

"I object to that!" cried Willman.

"Just a minute, Senator," said Hensdrel. He walked toward Kird. "Who was killed, Carey?"

"You'll find out soon enough," said Kird. "Go back to your room."

Colonel Times laughed that dry chuckle. "Not much use keeping it a secret, Carey. The whole world will know it in a day or two. You can't hide an important man's death much longer."

"You're damn' right he can't," said Connought. "When the country learns Edgerlane has been killed right under Carey's eyes, I think we'll have a new Special Prosecutor in New York."

"Edgerlane was killed?" said Hensdrel. He looked at Kird, and whistled. "No wonder you wanted to trade, Carey."

He laughed and started back toward his room. Colonel Times looked at Kird and shook his head. Then he too went to his room and closed the door. Plover waved a heavy fist at Kird.



Hensdrel lay on the walk. "Nice timing," said Kird. "Waited until I was napping, and gave him the works."

"I want Hensdrel watched tonight," he said. "If you don't put a guard on his door, I wouldn't advise you or anyone else to come knocking on mine. I'll shoot first and talk later."

"But what about me?" cried Willman. "I can't handle a gun—don't know how to use one."

"You'll learn," said Kird.

Connought started down the hall. He spoke quietly to Plover as he passed, and the labor leader nodded in silent agreement. Kird waited until all of the doors were closed, and stepped with Jane into her room.

"Get me some writing-paper," he said. "A flock of it."

She took a dozen or more sheets from a small desk near the windows.

"What are you going to do?" she asked.

Kird winked. "I'm giving my brains their last chance," he said. "Playing story-book detective. If it doesn't work, I'll try it the hard way—the system we used on the squad."

She was close to him. "Be careful, Kird," she said quietly. "These men are smart—so very smart. I'm worried about you, dear."

He lifted her chin and looked into her eyes. "I can't miss, Jane. Not with you on my side." He kissed her. "Go to bed and stop worrying. In the morning I'll have my man all tied up and ready for jail."

He stepped out of the room and closed the door behind him.

Careful to make no noise, he walked along the hall and quietly covered the rug before each door with a few sheets of paper. It was stiff, and crackled at the lightest touch. Then he returned to the living-room and put out the lights. The grounds were wrapped in quiet. Save for an occasional growl from one of the dogs, there was no sound. Kird found a chair, dropped his gun into his coat pocket and sat in the darkness.

HE felt like a man who plays a crooked wheel at the only gambling-house in town. He couldn't win. But it was his only chance to gamble. One of those men on the upper floor was Hensdrel's boss. That man thought Hensdrel was going to be tried for murder. And Kird hoped he would try to rub out Jimmy Hensdrel. The politician was live bait, and Kird had set his trap.

He stood up and walked quietly to the door that led to the pool terrace.

There was no moon, but the water mirrored the glint of a thousand stars. He walked to a clump of silver spruce and turned to look up at the windows beyond the balcony. Behind one of these was a man with little sleep in his eyes.

The night grew black. And as Kird walked slowly back toward the house, he knew Jane would be facing a district attorney before the petunias at the pool edge had carried their last flower.

AN hour passed—another. Dawn rose out of the east, and Deepwood came up from the land of night. Trees took form, and as Kird looked from the living-room windows, moving shadows turned into guards that walked with short-leashed dogs. Day was coming with all of its realities, and nothing had happened. No one had tried to kill Hensdrel. And Morton, the butler, was asking Kird if he wanted eggs for breakfast.

"What about the guests?" asked Kird.

"Senator Willman and Mr. Connought have ordered breakfast served in their rooms, sir," said Morton. "I haven't heard from the others."

"Go up and knock on their doors," said Kird. "And while you're at it, clean up the hall. Some idiot spread paper all over the place."

"Paper?" said Morton. "Who did that, sir?"

"I did," said Kird. "And this morning I want my eggs hard boiled, Morton."

The butler looked worried. He was still worried when he served Kird, and found Colonel Times and Sam Plover at the table. They both ordered hearty meals, and seemed slightly amused at Kird's heavy eyes and stubble of beard.

"Not much sleep, eh, Carey?" said Times. "I can't understand why you don't hang it on Connought and make the girl an accessory. Better that way than the reverse, you know."

"My idea, exactly," said Plover. He was busy with grapefruit, and worried about his eggs. "Wish you could hook Willman into the thing too. Accessory after the fact or some such charge."

Kird didn't answer. He had seen Jane at the top of the stairs, and her eyes matched his in weariness. She came to the table, ordered toast and coffee and looked inquiringly at Kird. He shrugged and said nothing. When Morton returned with the toast, he reported that a sound truck was at the outer gate.

"Let it in," said Kird. He turned to Times. "You understand, Colonel, that no mention of this is to be made on the air?"

"Of course," said Times. "May I suggest you listen in? It might be interesting."

"I'll listen," said Kird.

The radio men came into the living-room, and the Colonel went with them to his room to supervise the installation of the microphone. It was arranged that the engineer would set up his controls in the living-room within sight of Kird. At a word from Carey, the broadcast could then be stopped.

The Colonel was coming down from his room when Jimmy Hensdrel walked to the top of the stairs. He was chipper and smiling, and he put one arm across Times' shoulders.

"Good morning, Colonel," he said. "Did you sleep well?"

"Quite well, considering that you were in the house," said Times sharply.

Hensdrel winked at Kird. "How about you?"

"I'm still awake, Jimmy," said Kird. "And I'm wondering if you've decided to play ball."

"Play ball?" repeated Hensdrel. There was amusement in his eyes. "I don't have to, Carey. You're doing that for me. You've gathered just the team I want to provide my defense fund."

"Come again, Jimmy. I don't get that."

Hensdrel laughed. "In that case, I'll lay it right on the line. I didn't get to be boss of lower New York because I'm dumb. Not at all. I run things because I know the right people. It's the first law of politics—meet the right people and make 'em like you."

"I'm listening," said Kird.

HENS DREL motioned to the butler and pointed to Plover's breakfast. "The same for me," he said, and turned to Kird. "You learned that rule on the cops, and it paid dividends. You met Edgerlane, and he made you." Hensdrel leaned closer to Kird. "But he's gone, Carey—he's dead. You've lost your only powerful friend; and in two weeks you'll be looking for a job, unless you act smart."

"Meaning?" said Kird.

"That you're out on a limb," said Hensdrel. "Senator Willman is just waiting to take a crack at you. When he leaves Deepwood, he'll start an in-

vestigation of your term in office. And while he's doing it, he'll kick in to my defense fund. In fact, I intend to put the bee on the Senator this morning."

"You're over your head, Jimmy," said Kird. But he knew Hensdrel was telling the truth and talking good politics. "He wouldn't touch you with a ten-foot pole."

Hensdrel winked and grinned. "He'll call me brother and like it," he said. He motioned toward Plover. "And my old pal Sam will put his weight behind Willman. He'll join the cause and contribute plenty. Won't you, Sam?"

PLOVER didn't answer. His toast was requiring all of his attention, and he buttered a slice with deliberate care. Kird looked quickly at Jane, and she motioned toward Hensdrel with a slight movement of her head. Kird thought it meant: "Keep him talking." So he grinned at the politician.

"Speaking right out in church, eh, Jimmy?" he said.

"Why not?" asked Hensdrel as he jabbed at the grapefruit. "You've dug up all my pals and you deserve something in return for the favor."

"Is Connought on your side?" asked Kird.

"He will be," said Hensdrel. He nodded toward Times. "And so will the Colonel. He'll use his influence to keep me out of jail, and he'll help to break you if you don't grow smart in a hurry, Carey."

"Why?" asked Kird.

"Because I'm boss of half of New York, and I was raised in the old school, pal. I've got enough on each of these birds to make it very, very tough for them if I decide to talk." He looked questioningly at Plover. "Right, Sam?"

Plover shrugged his heavy shoulders. "No argument here, Jimmy," he said. "I know enough to call a spade when I see one. Maybe you're right." He turned to face Kird, and his smile was bland. "If you'll take my advice, Carey, you'll step lightly and listen to reason. If you don't want to take my word for it, ask Colonel Times. He'll back me up."

"The devil I will!" cried Times. "Don't drag me into this, Plover." He faced Hensdrel and his eyes were hard. "As for you, Hensdrel—no five-cent politician can say things like that about me. You'll prove your words or wish you had!"

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Kird was about to speak, but a tiny movement of Jane's head warned him to keep his mouth closed. He looked at Hensdrel, waiting for his answer.

It might have been good, but at that moment the radio men came down from the Colonel's room. Two of them left for the sound truck and the other motioned to the Colonel.

"Less than five minutes, Colonel," he said. "Will you try the mike and let me grab your voice, please?"

Times looked at his wrist-watch. He pressed his lips against his teeth and glared at Hensdrel.

"I'll talk with you after the broadcast," he said. "So will Senator Willman. He may be stupid, but I'm hanged if he'll let you get away with a remark like that."

"I'm not going anywhere, Colonel," said Hensdrel pleasantly. "Tell all the boys and girls their weekly lesson, and I'll be here when you finish."

Laughter touched the corners of his eyes as he watched Colonel Times hurry up the stairs to his room. The Colonel opened the door and pushed the radio-wires aside. He placed them at the corner of the sill and slammed the door against them.

"Great guy, the Colonel," said Hensdrel. "I like him, but thank the Lord I don't have to listen to his speeches." He finished his coffee and stood up. "See you all later, folks. I'm going out and get some morning. I'll be on the pool terrace, Carey, if you'd like to talk business. No hurry, though. Take your time."

He walked across the room and went through the doorway leading to the pool. Plover watched him, smiling under his heavy brows in amusement at some hidden joke. He leaned back in his chair and searched his pockets methodically.

"Guess you'll have to excuse me," he said to Kird and Jane. "I've left my pipe in my room." He started toward the stairs, but turned before he mounted them. "Don't tell the Colonel I didn't hear his speech. He'd feel terrible if the whole twenty million weren't listening to him."

KIRD smiled but didn't mean it. The radio man was working at the control unit; above the sound of his voice came the drone of a plane. It crossed the house and circled the grounds. A moment later it came to a landing on the nearest fairway of the golf-course.

"Why did that plane stop here?" asked Jane.

"I ordered it for the Senator," said Kird. He motioned to Jane, and walked to the telephone that stood in a cabinet against the far wall. "Adding it all together, Jane, I might as well tell you that I've been licked to a fare-thee-well. Hensdrel isn't bluffing. I gambled on a break that didn't come."

"What are you going to do now?"

"Call the coroner and report the murder. After that, I'm going to try one more trick. If that doesn't work, I'm going to use whatever brains I've got to send Jimmy Hensdrel to the chair."

JANE waited until he had put through the call. Then, still acting as Edgerlane's secretary, she phoned the managing editor of his newspapers and gave him the story of the publisher's death. When she put down the receiver, she turned, to find Kird studying the doors of the guest-rooms.

"Now what?" she asked.

"Oh, nothing important," he said. "Just trying to decide which of the boys gets the first beating."

"Beating?"

"Yeah—beating. Before the army of reporters gets here I'm going to practice what I learned when I was a cop."

"Kird! Act your age," said Jane. "If you do that, you'll ruin yourself. You've got to fight a smart man with brains. Not muscle!"

Kird shook his head. "The brains are gone, Jane," he said. "I realized that this morning. Edgerlane taught me everything I know, and he was always on tap to help me when the going got tough. I talked my cases out with him and accepted his advice. Now he's gone, and I'm—well, I'm just a cop without a job."

Jane took his hand and held it tightly in both of hers. She looked up at him, and her eyes were filled with a wistful softness. "Can't I help, Kird?" she asked. "He used to let me think for him more than once. Secretaries do that, you know. So do wives."

The radio man was holding his stopwatch toward them, and the hands showed one minute to ten. "Tune in and catch the broadcast, if you want."

Kird nodded and started toward the radio. Jane caught his arm and stopped him. "When it's over," she said, "I want you to promise you won't try any strong-arm work until we play our last card."

"What card?" asked Kird. "I didn't know there were any left in the deck."

"There's just one," said Jane. "Somewhere in Deepwood is a shirt with a stain of lip-rouge on the cuff. We'll find it this morning."

She went with him to the radio and turned the dial to a New York station. Immediately the Colonel's voice came from the speaker as he addressed his twenty million listeners throughout the country. It was the usual speech—starvation in the midst of plenty; the country was going to pieces; ruined by the money-changers and false prophets. But Colonel Times would lead his people out of the desert of starvation and into the land of plenty.

"Strange, isn't it," said Jane. "Those words are leaving Deepwood, traveling for miles and returning again."

Kird's smile was sour. "If he said what he'd like to, he'd blow the tubes out of every set in the country."

TWO shots, flat and hard, sounded above the Colonel's voice. Kird was not sure if they came from the pool terrace or from the upper floor. The stairs were nearer than the door to the pool and he headed for them. Jane ran with him, but swung off to the left near the foot of the stairs. An alarm-switch was set in a wall box, and she reached up, pulled the handle and turned to watch Kird.

He had stopped for an instant at Colonel Times' door, but the Colonel had continued his address in spite of the shots. Kird ran to the next door and tried to open it. It was the entrance to Senator Willman's suite, and it was locked. He pounded upon the panel, tried the knob again, and suddenly realized the alarm bell was ringing.

"Shut that off, Jane!" he yelled.

"Wait until the guards get here," she answered.

"Shut it off!" he yelled again.

She reached for the switch and threw it. Kird twisted the knob, and the door opened. Senator Willman was coming from the bath, pulling a robe across shoulders that were still dripping water.

"What's going on here?" he cried. "Those shots—what happened? I demand an explanation!"

Kird ran to the tall French windows and opened them. "How long have you been under the shower?"

"How long?" said the Senator. "Why—ten minutes—five—I don't know. I was there when I heard two shots."

Kird looked across the pool toward a clump of silver spruce. Jimmy Hensdrel lay on the tiled walk.

"Nice timing," said Kird. "Waited until I was napping, and gave him the works." He turned to Willman. "Let's have that gun of yours, Willman!"

"Gun?" said the Senator. He seemed bewildered. "Oh, yes—on the dresser. Right there by the windows. On the dresser."

"There isn't any gun here," said Kird.

"Ridiculous," said Willman. He hurried across the room. "I put it there last night. Unloaded it first because I'm afraid of guns. Put it right on the dresser top."

"And it flew away," said Kird dryly.

"It was stolen!" cried Willman. "Stolen, and I know the thief. Sam Plover stopped in while I was under the shower. He took it. Search Plover!"

"Search who?" asked Plover. He was at the doorway, pipe in hand. "What are you yawping about, Willman?"

"Did you take a gun out of this room?" asked Kird.

"Of course not!"

"Were you in here?"

"Certainly," said Plover. "I stopped in to talk with Willman about Hensdrel. Wanted to see how he stood. He was under the shower, so I told him I'd be in later."

"Where's your gun?" asked Kird.

"Right here."

Plover produced his gun, and Kird took it. He sniffed the barrel and handed the gun back to the labor leader.

"Did you see Willman's gun on that dresser?" asked Kird, pointing.

"Yes—come to think of it, I did," said Plover. "And unless I'm deaf, those two shots came from this room. Willman decided Hensdrel was too hot, and killed him." Plover was enjoying his story and making the most of it. He walked to the windows, aimed across the balcony and then turned to face Kird. "Sure — that's what happened. He killed Hensdrel and threw his gun into the pool."

"That's an outrageous lie!" yelled Willman.

CONNOUGHT was in the doorway, now, and Kird asked for his gun.

"Sorry," said Connought. "I lost it last night while I was looking for Jane. Slipped out of my hand near the golf-course. It fell down among the rocks of that gully near the second green."

"A likely story!" cried Willman. "He lost his gun!"

"That's right, Senator," said Connought. "But I wonder if Kird Carey has an unused gun or an alibi?"

Kird started to answer, but Jane came into the room and touched his arm. "I've ordered guards stationed along the balcony," she said. "If Senator Willman's gun is in the pool, Morton will find it. I've told him to drag the bottom."

"Nice work, Jane," said Kird. He walked to the door and glanced down into the living-room. "Who's that down there?"

"The coroner," said Jane. "He's a doctor, and he's trying to help Jimmy Hensdrel."

"Is Hensdrel alive?" asked Kird.

"Yes, but he's badly hurt."

KIRD motioned to the men in the room and started down the stairs. The coroner had removed Hensdrel's coat and shirt and was working on a wound that was just under Hensdrel's right shoulder-blade. He nodded to Kird and finished his bandaging.

"Through and through," he said. "Dangerous but not fatal. He'll make it, I think."

"Good thing you're here," said Kird.

"Very good," said the coroner. He was thin, and looked like his trade. He handed Kird a small slip of paper. "Read that. It was in his hand."

Kird looked at the note. The characters were printed and large: "MEET ME ALONE AT TEN ON THE POOL TERRACE TO ARRANGE YOUR DEFENSE." It wasn't signed. Kird handed it to Jane and bent down to look at Hensdrel.

"How's about it, Jimmy?" he asked. "Awake?"

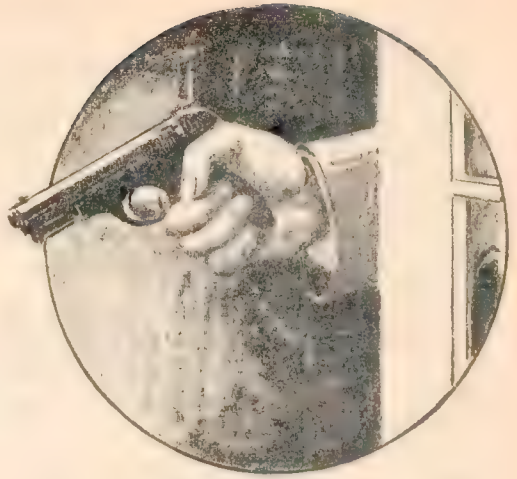
"Just about," said Hensdrel. "Did I hear that doctor say I'd make the grade?"

"Yes."

"Then I agree with him," said Hensdrel. "But it's going to be an expensive morning for the man who shot me, Carey. He'll donate a quarter-million to my defense-fund, or else—"

"Don't be a sucker, Jimmy," said Kird. "You won't need a defense-fund. The man who shot you will do a better job next time. He'll get you, even if you're in the Tombs. Why don't you act smart and string along with me?"

"Carey—be a good guy and stop asking riddles. I'm a sick man."



Kird showed him the note. "Who wrote this?"

"Santa Claus," said Hensdrel.

"You mean you don't know?"

"That's right."

Jane pushed Kird aside and bent over the injured man. She pointed to the note. "I know who wrote it, Hensdrel," she said. "He's the same man who killed Mr. Edgerlane. In two minutes I'm going to tell his name."

"Why wait two minutes?" asked Hensdrel.

"To give you a chance to accept Kird's offer."

Hensdrel closed his eyes. "Be a nice girl and stop talking," he said. "If I laugh, I'll start bleeding again."

"You don't believe me?"

"No," said Hensdrel.

Jane turned to Connought. "Turn back your right coat-sleeve, Mark," she said.

Connought turned back the cuff of his gray coat.

His shirt was clean, and Jane turned to face Plover. "May I see your right cuff?" she asked.

Plover's eyebrows came down, and he growled. "Damn' nonsense, that's what it is."

He turned back the sleeve of his coat, and his shirt was spotless. Jane examined it closely. Senator Willman had been hurrying into his clothes; and while Jane was examining Plover's sleeve, he joined the group about Hensdrel.

"Now what?" he asked. "Are we ever going to have the proper authorities work on this case?"

"Your shirt cuff, Senator," said Jane. She helped him turn back his coat. "I won't be a moment."

She looked at the cuff, and found it without any mark or stain.

"It was a good try, Jane," Kird said. "Now maybe I'd better work my way."

He nodded toward the radio, and it was evident by the Colonel's words he was reaching the end of his address. "When Times comes down, you can look him over. If you don't find anything, I'll have a talk with each."

"You'll do nothing of the sort," said Jane. "Shut off the radio and try to be patient."

Kird walked to the radio as the Colonel finished his speech. An announcer cut in and said: "This is WMBB—Maine." Kird snapped the switch and turned away. Jane was at his side.

"But Kird," she said quickly, "I tuned in a New York station."

Kird glanced at the dial. "That's right, Jane," he said. Then a slow smile touched the corners of his mouth, and he crouched beside Hensdrel. "Jimmy," he said quietly, "don't ever let it get whispered around, but you're the world's prize sap."

"After you, Carey," said Hensdrel. "When the newspapers hear of this week-end party, you'll draw that title."

Colonel Times joined them. He glared at Hensdrel and then turned to Kird. "What's been going on around here?" he asked. "I've been trying to make an important broadcast, and the place is a bedlam."

Before Kird could answer, Jane touched the Colonel's arm. "Would you mind turning back your cuff, Colonel?" she said. "Just the right one, please."

Without waiting for him to comply, she reached down and drew back the end of his coat-sleeve. The shirt cuff beneath it was unmarked; and for an instant Jane's face was a playground for a dozen expressions.

"Well?" said Times. "What's this all about?"

"I'm puzzled, Colonel," said Jane. She pointed to the white material. "I can't understand how the small flowered design that was on your shirt last night could have moved over to Jimmy Hensdrel's shirt." She motioned toward the blood-soaked shirt on the arm of the divan. "Or, by any chance," she asked, "did you change shirts with Hensdrel during the night?"

TIMES looked from one to the other of the men in the room. He lifted his hand in a questioning gesture. "Has she gone out of her mind?" he asked. "My shirt—Hensdrel's shirt! Of course I'm wearing my own shirt. The girl is unbalanced."

Kird looked thoughtfully at Jane.

"Let's have your gun, Colonel," he said. "Some one shot Hensdrel, and we're checking up."

Times produced his gun. "Look at it if you wish," he said. "It's the same as it was when I got it."

Kird sniffed the barrel and took out the clip. Two shells were missing, but obviously the gun had not been used.

"Where are the shells, Colonel?" he said. "Two short."

Times shrugged. "Perhaps there are," he said. "I haven't examined the clip. It might have been partly empty when Edgerlane gave it to me."

Kird was forced to admit the probability of the Colonel's statement. He weighed the gun in his hand and looked doubtfully at Times. Morton came in and handed a wet gun to Kird.

"It was on the pool bottom not far from the house balcony," he said. "It could have been thrown there from the upper floor, sir."

"Thanks, Morton," said Kird. He took a handkerchief from his pocket and twisted a corner into the barrel. When it came out, it carried a powder stain. Kird looked at Willman. "This is either your gun or Connought's," he said. "I'll tell you in a moment."

"My gun was stolen, I tell you!" cried Willman. "Some one took it from my dresser while I was in the shower."

KIRD had glanced quickly at Edgerlane's note. He looked at the number on the gun and nodded. "Your gun, Senator."

Hensdrel laughed. "Think you can raise a quarter of a million, Senator?" he asked. "That's the amount I'll need to beat the charges against me."

"But I didn't shoot you, Hensdrel!" said Willman. "I swear I didn't—my word of honor!"

"Hardly convincing," said Colonel Times dryly.

"It is to me," said Kird. "Senator Willman didn't shoot Hensdrel—didn't kill Edgerlane, either. You did both jobs, Colonel."

"You'll prove that statement, Carey," said Times. "Prove it, or I'll bring charges against you."

"Gladly," said Kird. He lifted the shirt the coroner had taken off Hensdrel and held up the cuff. There was a smear of lip-rouge on it. "Your shirt, Colonel. You walked along the balcony last night and Hensdrel let you into his room. He

couldn't have killed Edgerlane, so you told him to wear your shirt out of Deepwood while you paraded in his. You were his boss, and he agreed. But this gave him a stranglehold on you, Colonel—a stranglehold on the man who wants to be dictator of America."

"A fine theory," said Times. "It's going to be rather difficult to prove, Carey."

"I'll do that," said Kird. He showed Times the note taken from Hensdrel. "When the microphone was being installed, you slipped this under Hensdrel's door. He went to the pool to keep the appointment. You walked the balcony to Senator Willman's room, tried to use the Senator's gun but found it empty."

Times laughed. "Why did I use his gun when I had one of my own?"

"For the same reason you used a knife to kill Edgerlane," said Kird. "You know guns can be tied to the bullets they fire. So you took two shells from your own clip, loaded the Senator's automatic and shot Hensdrel. Tried to kill the man who was helping you."

There was a silence in the room when Kird finished talking. Plover, Connought and Willman were all watching Colonel Times closely. Hensdrel's eyes were closed, but it was evident he was listening to each word. The coroner and radio man were interested spectators in a drama that was almost wholly a mystery to them. Colonel Times was the most nonchalant man in the room.

"Not a bad story, Carey," he said. "But twenty million people in this country can swear I was delivering an uninterrupted address while Hensdrel was shot. Even a smart prosecuting attorney like you can't break twenty million alibis."

There was a murmur from the men, and Hensdrel opened his eyes. He was in pain, but he tried for a smile. Kird admired the man's courage. He leaned close to him and spoke into his ear.

"Your last chance, Jimmy," he said. "Want to make a deal?"

"Sorry, pal," said Hensdrel.

"Still going to string along with a man who tried to kill you?"

"He says different," said Hensdrel. "I'd rather believe twenty million listeners than you—even if your record says you don't lie."

"It's still a good record, Jimmy," said Kird. He pointed to the radio cabinet. "You heard Colonel Times finish his

speech. And you heard a radio announcer give the call letters of a Maine broadcasting station. All of the men in this room will agree the radio is tuned to a New York station—has been tuned to that station since ten." He turned to face the Colonel, and as he spoke he kept his gun muzzle moving slowly across Times' chest. "You made just one mistake, Colonel. When you tuned in a Maine station on the radio in your room—a station that was using a previously recorded program—and you set the microphone before the speaker, you worked up a fine alibi. It left you fifteen minutes to shoot Hensdrel with Senator Willman's gun and get back to your room. But you didn't know I had just acquired a new set of brains."

"Talk sense," snapped Times.

"Oh, I am," said Kird. He put one arm about Jane's shoulders. "When the gun went off, my partner was smart enough to pull the alarm-switch that closes and locks the doors and windows. That nailed everyone right into position. It locked the window to your room, and you couldn't get back. You had to run along the balcony and hide under the stairs. When the alarm-switch was released, Jane had stationed guards on the balcony, and you couldn't get back in time to end the broadcast. The Maine call letters went on the air, and twenty million listeners became my witnesses. They can swear you weren't in your room during the broadcast. And even a smart killer can't break down twenty million witnesses, Colonel."

"WELL, I'll be damned," said Hensdrel slowly.

He glanced up at Kird. "If it had been any of the others, I'd have played the string out, Carey. I can't hate a guy for trying to save money. But when my own boss—the man I expected to be dictator of this cockeyed country—" He ran the tip of his tongue along his lips. "When he tries to kill me because I'm wearing his shirt, Carey, I'm through."

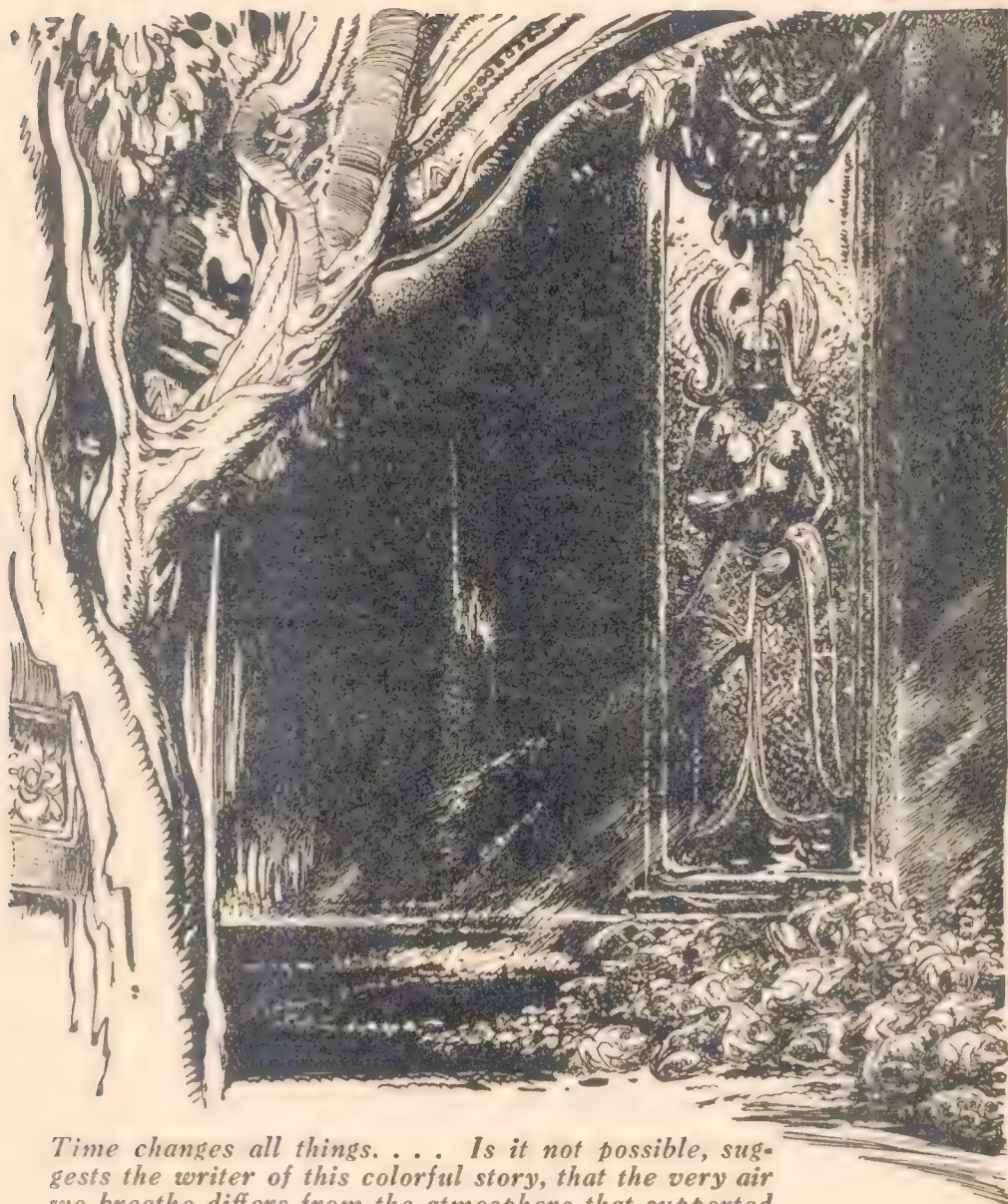
"The deal is still open, Jimmy," said Kird.

"Yeah?" said Hensdrel. "Then get a stenographer that can take fast dictation."

"She's right alongside of you," said Jane. She nudged Kird. "Lock the Colonel in a closet or do something with him, Kird. Then get me a pencil and my notebook."

"Okay, boss," said Kird.

The CAVE of



Time changes all things. . . . Is it not possible, suggests the writer of this colorful story, that the very air we breathe differs from the atmosphere that supported the pterodactyl and dinosaur?

By JAMES FRANCIS DWYER

JAN KROMHOUT, the big Dutch naturalist, lowered himself into a huge rattan chair and looked out across the green swath of palms and canarium trees. Kromhout's camp, in which I was a guest, was close to the village of Brajonolon, in central Java; and from the terrace of the bungalow we could see the great Temple of Bororboedoe. In splendid majesty it rose be-

fore us; the mighty Tjandi Bororboedoe, "Shrine of the Many Buddhas."

Not as large as the monuments of Angkor Wat, Ajanta and Alara, the Temple of Bororboedoe is considered more beautiful in architectural design. Its carvings, still intact after twelve hundred years, bring thousands of tourists to stare at the bas-reliefs. Those bas-reliefs, if placed in a straight line, would

the **INVISIBLE**



"They were afraid, those toads. Possibly they saw things that we did not see."



sometimes I think that in the days to come, we might have instruments so delicate that we could measure the spiritual intensity of places like this temple. Measure the degree of faith, of hope, of longing for a better world. I would like to measure the holy dreams that fill the Oude Kerk in Amsterdam, that was built in about 1300, or the air of St. Paul's and St. Peter's, or that place in the Mosque of Saint Sophia at Stamboul that is called 'The Holy Wisdom.'"

"'That girl,' the Russian said to me, 'is something precious; she believes she is a reincarnation from other days.'"

extend for more than three miles. Here was the center of Buddhist influence in Java in the Sixth Century. . . .

"Belief is a strange thing," said Kromhout, his eyes upon the temple. "There are many places throughout the world where the atmosphere has been charged with a definite spiritual quality put into it by the reverence of believers. Buddhism in Java is dead—Mohammedanism has throttled it; but a blind person who came close to this sanctuary would sense the awe and mystery that is still here. Still here after centuries have passed. *Ja*. Into the mixture of oxygen, hydrogen and carbon-dioxide has filtered a spiritual compound that does not react to the instruments of the scientists. It is Faith.

"Do you know that argon, one of the constituents of the atmosphere, was only discovered forty years ago? It is present in seven or eight parts to a thousand in the air we breathe; but we did not know it was there till Lord Rayleigh and Sir William Ramsay discovered it toward the end of the last century. That discovery makes me hopeful. Sometimes—

For a long interval the big naturalist remained quiet; then with a strange eagerness in his voice he went on: "If such an instrument were perfected, one might also be able to measure the devilish quality of places. Of demon-filled places that I have visited in the Malay."

In silence we sat and stared at Tjandi Bororboedoer. The sun had set; and a soft rose tint spread slowly over the porous trachyte and lava blocks of which the temple is constructed. This tint deepened to a gorgeous crimson, changed to a dark red; then with a fierce suddenness the tropic night plunged upon the building and blotted it out.

Filled with black gloom now were the interminable galleries with their two hundred scenes of Buddha's spiritual experiences. Invisible were the thrilling bas-reliefs beginning with that of Mâya, the mother of Buddha, watching the white elephant descending on a lotus flower from heaven to symbolize the conception of her son, and ending with the last thrilling scenes that show the weapons of the Prince of Darkness turning into flower petals as they fall upon the head of the saint.

FROM the soft dusk came the voice of Jan Kromhout. The great Buddhist sanctuary seemed to be nearer now. It was, I thought, squatting just beyond the row of flame trees whose red flowers perfumed the night.

"At times," said the big Dutchman, "the East frightens me. I become the victim of terrors. Then I pack my things and take a trip home to Amsterdam, so that I can get my courage back. There is sanity in Holland. Much sanity. I am nearer to God when I put my feet on Kalver Straat. I go and sit in the Oude Kerk, and those stained-glass windows of the Lady Chapel make me feel clean and good. There is a lot of faith in stained glass. And I go to the Ryks Museum and look at the fine pictures by Frans Hals and Rembrandt and Rubens, and so I cure myself. *Ja, ja*. I cure myself.

"Five years ago I went back to see my sister and her husband. I stayed a month; then the East came in the night and whispered to me. I thought that the whimperings of little animals came up to my room from the Leidsche Kade. My sister cried and begged me to stay, but I could not.

"On the ship that brought me to Batavia, I made friends with a strange man. He was a Russian named Andrey Ilyin, and he was an archæologist. He was but thirty-four years of age, and he was big and strong and bold-looking. And he was a dreamer. A great dreamer. Some one has said that there is no rest for the man who is both a dreamer and a man of action, and this Russian was of that type. He knew the East. He thought it the cradle of life, the home of all the mysteries. He had many ideas that were disturbing; and in the hot, heavy nights crossing the Indian Ocean we stayed up on deck and argued till the dawn.

"He put forward theories that were not supported by scientific evidence; but that lack of evidence did not trouble him. *Neen*. He just jumped across the gulfs, and when you asked him how he got to the other side, he laughed. He thought that scientists lacked imagination, that they spent too much time building bridges instead of hopping mentally to the other side. It may be so. Dreamers see many things.

"One of his theories I had big cause to remember. I will never forget it. He thought that longevity was a matter of breathing the same atmosphere that we had started to breathe. That life depended on the constancy of the atmosphere. You see, we did not know what the atmosphere was composed of, till Cavendish made his tests at the end of the Seventeenth Century. And Cavendish did not know of argon and of other substances.

"The atmosphere we are breathing is not the same as the Pleistocene or the Neolithic man breathed," said Ilyin. "It is not the atmosphere in which the mammoth and the dinosaur lived. We know nothing of its composition in those days. A change in it might have killed them off. Then again the longevity of Methuselah might be accounted for by the air he breathed. Some special brand."

"Sometimes he made me laugh; sometimes he puzzled me. When we were near Tandjong Priok, he told me the reason of his visit. He was searching for old atmosphere! *Old, Ja, oud!* Atmosphere that had not changed for hundreds of years. Air which was the same air that blew over the Malay in the days when King Asoka sent a piece of Buddha's body to Java as propaganda for Buddhism. They were good propagandists in those days.

"How can you find such a place?" I asked Ilyin.

"There might be an old temple bottled up and forgotten," he said. "You know how wine gets better with age? If I found such a place, the atmosphere might have improved."

"I said good-bye to that Russian at Tandjong Priok. I was not sorry. He talked too much. We Dutch say, *Der gaan veel woorden in een zak*. Many words go to one sack."

KROMHOUT rose from his chair as a soft whimper came from within the bungalow. The black ape was on the point of becoming a mother, and the big naturalist went inside to comfort her. I could hear his voice assuring her that he was close by, and that no harm could befall her.

Returning to the veranda, he took up his story. "I went here and there in my business of collecting specimens. I made a trip to Samarinda in Dutch Borneo, and I went from there to Makassar and on to the little San Miguel group in the Sulu Sea. Now and then I thought of that Russian and his theories. It was not easy to forget him. Ideas that are a little crazy stay in our heads when we forget matters that are founded on common-sense.

"I came back to Batavia, and I got a commission which took me to the volcanic country near Padjagalan. It is bad. The sulphur fumes and the carbonic gas kill birds and animals that are fool enough to stay around. It is a little piece of country that looks as if it might

blow up at any moment, when some of the old volcanoes start their fires again.

"I had been there two weeks when that Russian fellow Ilyin walked into my camp. 'It is old *Tête-de-Fromage*!' he cried. 'Old *Tête-de-Fromage* who will not be convinced!'

"He told me that he was camped some fifteen miles away, and that he was quite happy and contented. 'I heard that a Dutchman was trapping here, and I thought it might be you,' he said. 'I'm pleased because I wanted to tell you something. You remember our talks about atmosphere? Well, I have found proof of what I said to you on the ship.'

"What have you found?" I asked.

"He grinned at me. 'I have found a place where the air is six hundred years old,' he said. 'Six hundred years old, and pure.'

"Pure?" I asked.

"That is what I said, Dutchman,' he answered. 'Dry and pure. It has been bottled up for centuries. Six centuries or more. There has been no opening except one small door that is not used once in a century. The things living there, toads and lichen, die immediately when brought in contact with modern air.'

"You mean that they are killed by the light?" I said.

"No, by the air,' said Ilyin. 'I have moved them in the night. It is the air that kills them.'

"I sat silent, waiting for him to tell me more, and he did. 'There is something else about this place,' he said. 'Something extraordinary: the Past is there.'

"How?" I snapped.

"In the atmosphere,' he said quietly. 'The air of the place is impregnated with old memories. It has clung to them. They have been held in a sort of atmospheric solution because there has been no fresh air to disturb them. At times—at times you can feel and see enough to reconstruct what happened there.'

"Ja,' I said, 'I know all about those spots. They are not good. They are vicious. If you go trying to reconstruct events that have happened here six hundred years ago, you will get yourself into the crazy house, and the Dutch will ship you back to Russia.'

"Imagination,' said that fellow, 'is one of the greatest gifts of God. The straight back-heads of the Dutch and the Germans make it impossible for them to carry the gift. If you feel inclined to come over and visit me, I will show you all the proof that you want.'

"Of course I was curious to know what that fellow had found. My skin prickled with curiosity. He had given me directions; and three days after his visit, I went along the jungle path that led to his camp. That part of Java has many old temples. Quite close are the ruins of Brambaran, which was a Brahman temple dedicated to Vishnu and Siva. I found that Ilyin's camp was alongside a small temple so completely covered with crawling vines that you might pass it, thinking it was a green hill.

"I LYIN grinned when he saw me. 'I knew you would come,' he said; 'I have been watching the road for three days. Cheese and mysteries are great things to attract Dutch naturalists. Tell me, Kromhout, why you people put car-away seeds in your cheese?'

"To make fools ask the reason,' I snapped. 'Where is your old atmosphere that you were bragging about?'

"You must not approach it in that spirit,' said Ilyin. 'You see, there are reasons. I am not the owner or the real discoverer. I will introduce you, but if you please, try to look as if you believed, even if you lack the imagination to see beyond your nose.'

"I was annoyed, but I had come to see what I could see, so I followed Ilyin through the jungle till we came to a thatched hut. In the hut were an old man and a girl of about eighteen. First I will tell of the man. He was a Sundanese; and when I saw him, he was what is called *latah*. His eyes were glazed and his nostrils distended. I did not like the look of him.

"The girl—*Ach!* the girl was something that the gods of the jungle had made to peep at. She was just meeting womanhood. Her skin was of beaten gold, and all the dreams of the world were in her big frightened eyes. Eyes like the little musk deer that spoke to you, saying, 'Do not harm me; I am nice and innocent and I will be good.' Ja, they were wonderful eyes. And she had little teeth so white and beautiful that you wished that she could get annoyed and bite you with them. And she was dressed as she should be dressed. She had a six-foot strip of scarlet silk wound tightly around her waist, then thrown loosely across her bosom and over one of her shoulders. Sometimes that sash slipped from her shoulder, or maybe the little devils of the jungle pulled it away. In her left nostril she had a

small ruby that winked at you as much as to say: 'Wouldn't you like my job?'

"Ilyin spoke to the Sundanese, but that fellow was in dreamland and did not hear. The girl answered for him. She said we could not visit the temple that day. The man was *latah*; I would have to wait. That Russian tried to bully her, but she would not give way, although she was afraid of Ilyin, who was big and strong and did not think much of women. When that scarlet sash slipped from the girl's shoulder, Ilyin would grin like a tiger that meets a young antelope.

"Dutchman, you must stick around," he said. 'It will be worth it. You will know things after you have seen what I have seen.'

"For three days we waited. And we argued a lot. When I spoke of Hanne's '*Handbuch der Klimatologie*' or Woeikof's '*Die Klimate der Erde*,' that Russian would laugh at me. 'All the fellows that have written about climate and atmosphere write of them in relation to health and industry and crops,' he said. 'Not one of the idiots writes about the relation of climate to the soul. They tell how altitude affects circulation and respiration of the body, and how winds are bad for persons with certain complaints, but they say nothing of the effect of places on the vital principle, on the spirit. Look at this place! Wouldn't the atmosphere of this spot transform a man? Wouldn't it get into his blood?'

"If the damned leeches left him any blood!" I snapped. There was a strange quality around that place, but I would not let that Russian bully me. There is something that you say in the United States. *Ja!* That is it: you say 'I am from Missouri.' Well, I was from Amsterdam, and I wanted to be shown too."

AGAIN the black ape called to the naturalist. Kromhout hoisted himself from the chair and hurried to comfort her. As I listened, I detected a whispering accompaniment to his words. Other small captives knew of the condition of the black ape, and were troubled.

"On the fourth day that Sundanese got over his bout with hashish," continued Kromhout, as he returned. "He did not like me. He said the place was *kramat*; that meant it was too sacred and magical for me to put my big feet inside it. Ilyin swore at him. At last the Sundanese gave way.

"First we entered the temple proper. That was only an antechamber to the



"Ilyin was dashing and had charm—but he was a little mad."

real place. But we entered quick, so that not much fresh air could get in, and that no old air could escape. It was quite dark, but the Sundanese took my hand and led me. I would sooner have had the little hand of the girl, but that Russian had grabbed her as a guide.

"Why not a flashlight?" I asked.

"There is no need for one," said Ilyin. 'There is light in the vault where we are going.'

"That puzzled me, but I said nothing. We came to the far end of the temple and climbed down a stone stairway. I could see nothing, but I understood that we were in front of a stone doorway. Ilyin spoke to me. 'It is necessary to enter quick,' he said. 'When the old man pulls the lever, the stone will swing back. It will be light then. Sava, the girl, will go first, then you, then I and the old man. But move quick! *Poskorēe! Poskorēe!*' He was all excited.

"I could not understand how it would be light when the stone door opened, but I said nothing. Then the door swung back, and I found that Ilyin had spoken the truth. Through the lighted space hopped the girl; I stumbled after her, and after me came Ilyin and the old man.

"We were twenty feet underground, and there was no opening to that vault except the door through which we had come, but the place was illuminated. It was lit up like a phosphorescent sea. I thought for a moment that the light came from millions of fireflies, or the luminous beetles of the *Lampyridæ* that are related to glow-worms. I was wrong. The light came from a type of lichen that I had never seen. A variety of *Lecanora calacarea* that is mentioned by Engler and Prantl in their book '*Die natürlichen*



"'Old Tête-de-Fromage,' he called me."

Pflanzenfamilien. It sweats in the dark places where it grows, and its sweat is phosphorescent.

"That lichen covered the walls and the roof of that big vault—covered them like a silver tapestry. Lichen is strange stuff. Some day when the world dies, the lichen will make a death shroud. *Ja, ja*. And it will be very pretty. The blue-green algæ, the red and yellow *Agyrium*, and the phosphorescent *Lecanora* that covered the walls and roof of that great vault. Lichen is the beard of death.

"After I got over the shock from that growing stuff, I noticed the air. It was heavy, very heavy. It was so thick that you thought you could chew it, but it was not unpleasant. Not at all. It was soothing. Have you ever tried opium? *Neen?* Well, the air of that place brought to me the nice loosening of the nerves that you get after the first whiffs of an opium pipe. It rubbed against my face like an invisible kitten. It touched my hands and my bare calves. It got into my hair and tickled my scalp. It had the ways of a bazaar woman. Now and then I swung round with the belief that some one had touched me with a finger on the back of the neck.

"There were small toads hopping about on the stone floor of the vault—the jerboa type of toad, with long legs. Ilyin, the old man, and the girl Sava took care not to step on the toads; and when the girl saw that I did not take much care, she spoke to the Russian, and he whispered to me: 'Please be careful,' he said; 'the old man will get annoyed if you squash them.'

"'Why?' I asked.

"'The old man speaks to them,' said Ilyin. 'When he wants to show me

something extraordinary, he tells them to keep close to the wall so that they will not be trodden on by the others.'

"'What others?' I snapped.

"'You'll see,' he grinned. 'You'll see, Dutchman.'

"He was full of mystery, was that fellow. It was bubbling out of him. And the air that had fingers, and the phosphorescent lichen, were the hypodermic syringes with which he tried to squirt it into my system.

"We walked the length of that place. It was enormous. The pillars were beautifully carved with figures of birds and monkeys, and at the bottom of each pillar was a square stone box like those at Brambanan, that are filled with the dust of the dead. We did not speak. The only sounds were the *slap-slap* of the toads as their bellies hit the floor. It was not nice. The only sweet thing in that place was the girl. I thought she was afraid of that vault—quite a lot afraid of it.

"We came out from that place in the same manner as we went in—slipping quickly through the door at the bottom of the stairs. For an hour or so I felt that I had been drugged; then I was myself again, and able to argue with that Russian. I had to admit that the air was curious, but more I would not admit.

"'You have no imagination!' cried Ilyin. 'The French named you Dutch well when they called you *Têtes-de-Fromage*. Cheese-heads you are! You could not feel the Past in that place?'

"'I felt the air, and I heard the jerboa toads,' I said. 'Not more than that. It is good to have belief, but it is not good to have too much of it. That is the way to madness.'

"'Wait around,' said the Russian; 'you will see what you will see. The girl has promised me.'

"He smacked his lips when he spoke of that girl. There are two nations that strut when they speak of women—the German and the Russian; but the Russian has more charm. He is more dashing. He is a little mad, and women like madmen.

"I wanted to go away from that place, but I could not. It held me there because I felt that something would happen, something big. Have you noticed that lots of tragedies have been photographed? Those photographers have been there with the machines aiming at the spot where an automobile turns over, or some racehorse falls down, or that

Balkan king is shot. You think it is luck? It is not. The man with the camera sensed the accident before it happened. That is what makes the good press photographer. Sometime I will tell you a story about that business of sensing a smash.

"Each day I would see that Russian stalking the girl. *Ja*, stalking her like a black panther stalking a mouse deer. Whenever I saw the flash of her scarlet sarong in the jungle, I would see Ilyin close to her. And I would watch her eyes and watch those of the Russian. The fear was growing greater in hers; in his was the belief that he would conquer. He would pull his mustaches and brag about the girls that had loved him in Moscow when he was at the university. He made me sick with his talk.

"You had better watch that old man," I said to him.

"Pooh!" he cried. "He is nothing. The girl—ah, the girl is something precious. Do you know, Kromhout, that she believes she is a reincarnation from other days? She speaks as if she was around here when things were happening."

"Then she will know too much for you," I snapped.

"No woman knows too much for me," said that fool. "At the university they called me 'Little Andrey, the Fisher of Souls.' She will be mine very soon."

"Men are fools. We Dutch say: 'Roasted pigeons do not fly through the air.' It is a good proverb.

ONE morning I saw that old Sundanese creeping through the jungle on his hands and knees. I could not see Ilyin or the girl, but I guessed that old man was hunting for them.

"That afternoon Ilyin was very gay. He sang little Russian songs that were all about girls who loved very much and who were willing to kill themselves for fellows. He sang them in his own language, but he translated them for me. I thought them foolish. Dutch girls would not do the things that those songs told of. Not much. Dutch girls keep their feet on the ground very hard.

"Tonight, Kromhout," said Ilyin, "something might happen. It has been a big day for me. Sava loves me. *Da!* She loves me a lot. And she has promised me that she will make old sulky Mokhan put on a show tonight to celebrate our love-pact. In that vault we might see the Past."

The naturalist paused in his narrative. He sat silent in his big chair. I thought he might be marshaling the events of that evening of long ago, putting them in order, shaping them so that they could be intelligible. Or perhaps he thought that the pause might let the caressing fingers of the Malayan night bring to my mind the capacity for belief. Belief in the strange tale that he wished to unfold.

"It happened as that Russian thought it would happen," he said, and his voice was lowered as if afraid that the Tjandi Bororboedoer, squatting out in the thick darkness, might be annoyed at hearing him tell of the secrets of the long-buried past. "The girl persuaded the old man to put on a big show. *Ja*, a big show. And he did!

WHEN we climbed down into that vault, I thought the lichen was more phosphorescent than the first time. It might have been just fancy. I don't know. Perhaps I was excited. The air was that air that had fingers which tickled the back of my neck and rubbed my scalp.

"The Russian did not know what was going to happen. I do not think the girl knew. It was just the business of the old man. He was not *latah* now. He was alive. His black eyes were sparkling, and at times I thought there was a grin of delight on his face.

"We had walked about twenty paces when the noise started. *Ja*, the noise. It started at the far end of the vault, some hundred feet from where we were standing; and it came creeping toward us, eating up the silence. Eating up the silence like a great invisible mouth. It was funny. At first it was not a great noise. It was soft and rather soothing, but as it crept nearer and nearer, it became louder. Much louder.

"Now and then it would stop for a few seconds—stop as if it had been throttled. And all our eyes were turned to the spot where it had halted. Do you understand? We knew, although we could see nothing, that it had reached a certain point. It was near this or that carved pillar that supported the roof. A noise made by something that we could not see. Moving and stopping, moving and stopping.

"It grew louder. Much louder. New noises joined up with it. Noises that I could not place, noises that had been lost to the world when that temple went out of business. There was a devilish rumble that seemed to be the backbone of the



clamor. It came at intervals. It seemed to shake the temple. And it carried a poisonous fear with it. Drums of hell was that noise. *Ja*, drums of hell!

"When that big queer noise came, I thought the veins in my head would

burst. It led the others to a sort of crescendo; then it snapped off quick so that it hurt your head. And you could see nothing. Nothing at all. In that vast underground vault there was only the old man, Ilyin, the girl and myself. *Ja*, and the toads. Those toads were banked now inches high around the walls and around the pillars. They were afraid



"His size and weight were nothing, to the forces that were around him. He was thrown across, and struck the wall twenty feet away."

—those toads. Possibly they saw things that we did not see. That *bufo-jerboa* is clever. Very clever.

"Closer and closer came that racket. Bulging its way toward us! I leaned forward, pop-eyed and sweating, in an effort to see something. I have heard all the noises of the jungle, but I have never heard noises like those. They were devilish. They were beyond the intelligence of man. They woke memories of things that were snaky and slimy, things of the past when the bull-roarer struck fear into the hearts of those who heard it.

"In the bones of our ears are echoes that have been asleep for hundreds of years. Frightening echoes. They are

in the cells of our brains. They are part of us. We collected them in our climb out of the dark womb of the world. This civilization of ours is a small thing. It is of yesterday. It is the thin scum of conceit that we have placed upon the terrors of other days. And when we are frightened, that scum that is civilization, that is modernity, that is law and order and smugness and silly pomp and humbug, is broken by those memories that are mostly hooked up with sounds.

"They come out of the depths. The beat of the tom-toms, the clang of the devil-gongs, the hiss of big serpents, the

whirring of the wings of vampires and pterodactyls. *Ack!* This memory of ours is a terrible thing—for the subconscious is filled with sounds. There is stored the bellow of the mammoth and the sound made by the slime dripping from the scaly legs of the plesiosaurus!

"NOW, years after, I can hear those sounds of that vault when the world is quiet. I will always hear them. They are in my flesh, in my bones, in my blood. They are a fear-poison that has got into my body through my ears.

"I wished to run, but I could not. My legs had lost their power. They were boneless, and I was afraid that I would fall to the floor. The noise had swung a little to the left of us, and for that I was glad. You bet I was. If it had swept over us, I would have died from fear.

"The old man, the girl and the Russian did what I did—turned their heads to follow the sound. It was now surging between two great pillars of the vault, surging through them like a cataract of clamor!

"It was then that the girl cried out. She shrieked and pointed. Pointed at nothing that we could see, but something that was plain to her. Something or somebody. Somebody, I think. *Ja*, I am sure that she saw some one, at that instant.

"She shrieked again, and sprang forward; but that Russian was not going to let her get into that racket of noise. He grabbed hold of her waist and tried to hold her. He was strong, as I have told you; but she wished to touch something in the stream of noise. She was slippery like a snake. Her sarong was almost torn from her body as she wrestled; then as she leaped forward again, she and the Russian were in that frightening river of noise. They were in it! We knew!

"That Russian was six feet and a little bit. He weighed two hundred pounds, and he had muscles of steel. But his size and his weight did not matter much then. They were nothing to the forces that were around him. Nothing at all. Something picked him up. For an instant he was held horizontally at about three feet from the floor; then he was jerked head high and thrown across the vault, thrown across with such force that he struck the wall some twenty feet away. Struck it and dropped to the floor.

"That noise stopped then. Stopped with a suddenness that made me think I had become deaf. We did not move till

we heard the *slap-slap* of the toads as they moved away from the walls and the pillars. It was comforting to hear those jerboa toads moving about.

"I went over to the Russian. He was quite dead. His head had struck the wall, and his skull was fractured. I remembered his face for a long time. There was fear on it. A great fear. I have often wondered if he saw what it was that picked him up and tossed him across the vault. . . .

"Ja, there was an inquiry. The Dutch were angry about that business. They sent a magistrate from Djokja, and police came from Soerakarta. I told what I had seen and heard, and those police grinned. They were stupid fellows who could not believe anything unless they saw it with their little piggy eyes. And the fat magistrate from Djokja was so stuffed with *rystaefel* that there was no room for imagination.

"The girl would not speak. She was a little frightening. That fat magistrate asked her if the Russian had seduced her; and she looked at him in a way that gave him cold shivers. She did not like that question.

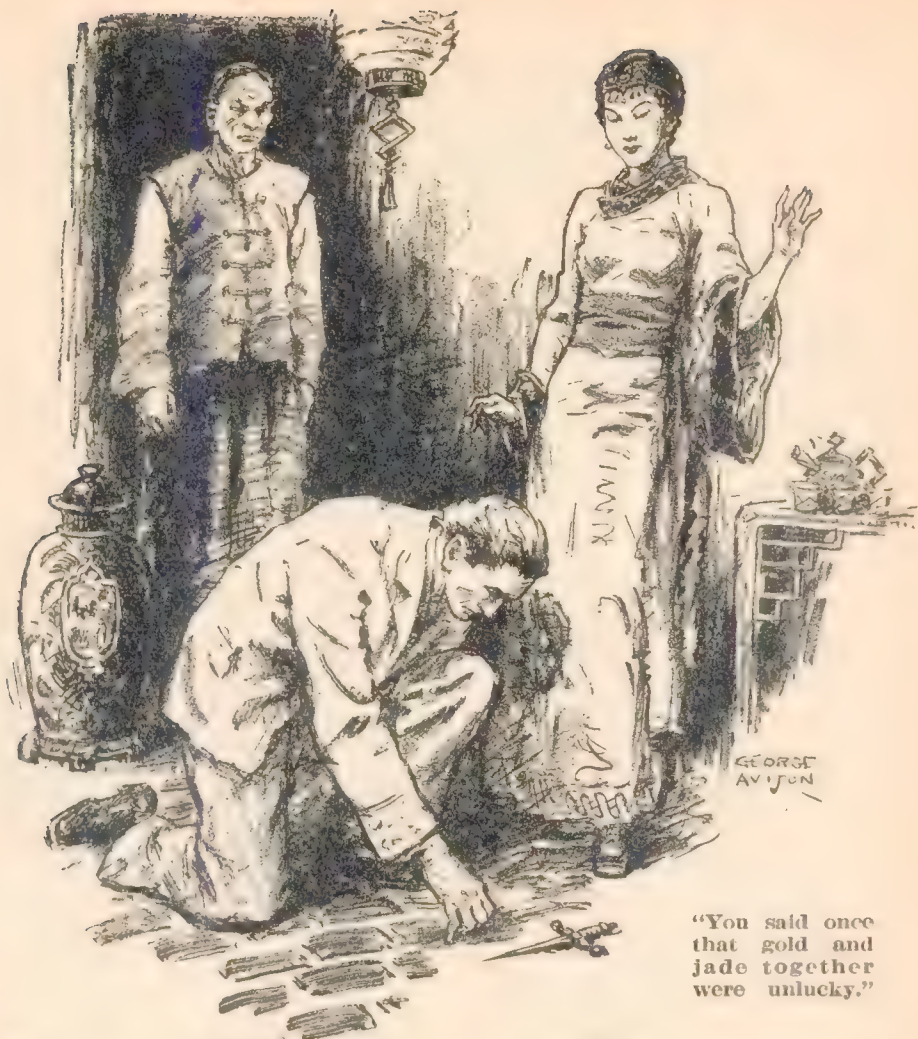
"The old man would not say much. When the magistrate asked her what had made the noise in the vault, he gave a funny answer. He said: 'They are the dead, that the years have eaten their bodies, but whose souls walk.'

"The police ruined that vault. They smashed down a part of the wall, and all that phosphorescent *Lecanora calacarea* shriveled in an instant when it met the air of the day. And those jerboa toads turned over on their backs and died with little croaks. It was a pity. I would have liked that some big man, some scientist of the order of Regnault or Angus Smith, should study the air of that chamber. Now it is too late."

THE big Dutchman rose and went within the bungalow.

I sat silently looking out across the dark stretch to where Tjandi Bororboedoer, "Shrine of the Many Buddhas," rose imperially. That foolish idea that the temple had moved closer to hear Kromhout's narrative was still upon me. I was a little afraid.

The big Dutchman reappeared. "The black ape has got a little one," he said, and his voice was soft with tenderness. "Come and look at it. She thinks it is the most wonderful baby ape that the Malay archipelago has ever seen."



"You said once
that gold and
jade together
were unlucky."

The First Clipper

"Ships and Men"—No. XXVIII

By H. BEDFORD-JONES
and CAPTAIN L. B. WILLIAMS

YEARS ago, in an uptown New York shop near One Hundredth Street, I bought a ship in a bottle. I took it home and gave it to my son. He still has it.

Last week Dr. Kung, a Chinese scholar sufficiently cultured to lecture in this country, was visiting me. He happened to see the bottle with the miniature ship, studied it a moment, and turned to me.

"Do you know the name of that ship?"

"It has none," I said carelessly. "It's just one of those things made by seamen to kill time."

"You mistake," he replied. "I think it's a model of the first genuine clipper ship, the *Rainbow*, built in New York in 1845. How do I know? That is very simple, my friend. As *Sherlock Holmes* would say, it is elementary. When we return to my hotel, I'll show you something."

Later, in his hotel room, he produced a small old book, the size of an autograph album.

This book was full of sketches. He turned to one page bearing the design of a full-rigged ship. Other pages showed



various details, not of rigs, but of the ship—the stern, the bows and so forth. Coming back to the sketch of the ship herself, I found that it did look oddly like that model in the bottle. However, it was certain that this sketch had not been done by any seafaring man; that it had been made by some Chinese artist was equally certain.

"This looks like a sketch made by a Chinese, back in clipper-ship days," I observed. "It isn't like any clipper ship I ever saw pictured, however, in some of its details."

Dr. Kung smiled in his gentle way.

"Oh, it was made before there were any clipper ships."

"What?" I gave him a sharp glance, wondering if he realized just what he was saying. "Is it that old?"

"Nearly a hundred years old," he rejoined. "The story is not what you, perhaps, would term a happy one. In those sketches are contained the life and death and ambition and struggles of men; all very curious. And that is how the American clipper ships came to be built."

"Eh? You're wrong there," I said in my positive Occidental fashion. "They

were due to a draftsman named Griffith, who invented them. The *Rainbow* was built from his designs. So—"

My eye fell upon the designs of the Chinese artist. One of them bore a date: *Canton, 1841*. As I fell silent, Dr. Kung smiled again.

"It might be argued," he said, "that no one ever really invented anything—except God. However, that has nothing to do with the matter in hand. I might tell you that the earliest printed book extant is a Chinese work whose printing was finished in May, 864 A.D.—but it would leave you cold. But were I to tell you the famous American clipper ships, which changed the history of seafaring, commerce and shipbuilding, came from China, you would prick up your ears."

"Decidedly," I assured him. "Their origin is too well known. Why, the giant airliners of today are known as China Clippers, after the old tea-ships!"

DR. KUNG positively beamed. He touched the date on the design.

"Precisely, my friend. At this date, American commerce was well established



like one white peony in a field of red ones?"

Dr. Kung's similes, while no doubt charming to an Oriental mind, had an unfortunate effect on the Occidental ear. However, he elucidated the matter, and conjured up a very satisfactory portrait

"I have learned of your honorable ambition to build a new type of ship," said Tan E. "All is settled."

Illustrated by
George Avison

in Canton; European commerce had a quarter to itself, the East India Company predominating. These factories or *hongs* handled their China trade through immensely wealthy Chinese merchants, and these *hong* merchants were great gentlemen. There were thirteen of them; and they had a monopoly on all foreign trade in Canton.

"One of these merchants was Tan E, who had purchased the blue button of a third-grade mandarin, and who dealt very largely with the American *hong*. His son, also known as Tan E, was a particular friend of Bob Clark; so, it might be said, was his daughter Chu or Pearl, an independent young lady who had imbibed heavily of foreign ways. This was a great scandal to poor old Tan E, but there was nothing he could do about it; he was that kind of a man. After all, he had many children. He could well spare one.

"Clark had been out here two years, and so far had not made his fortune. I wonder how to make you realize what sort of young man he was? Shall I say,

of Bob Clark—a thoughtful dreamer lost in a world of frenzied business activity. A slender, dark man, sensitive and aloof, with no leaning toward bawdy stories or singsong girls; a student who had mastered the Canton dialect in six months and was of such inestimable value to his firm that they overlooked all his eccentricities—even his friendship with the Tan E family.

CLARK was out of the *hong* more often than in it, and spent more time on the river in his skiff than at his desk; his very absences were of tremendous importance to his firm, for just then everything was changing, and he picked up information or even trade, where none else could.

The East India Company had lost their monopoly on English trade; the Opium War of 1840 had opened up other treaty ports; and American business was rushing out in cutthroat competition. Clark might have set up on his own and made a fortune, but that was not his way. He was content, and his firm was content. It was in the spring of 1841



For two days Clark worked furiously, carving a tiny boat-hull.

that Clark went to his boss, hard-jawed old Abner Perkins, about tea-ships.

"Mr. Perkins, I've been thinking it might be a good thing if we abandoned the practice of sending home mixed cargo, and sent some entire tea cargoes for a change."

"Brilliant idea, Mr. Clark," said old Abner with sarcasm. "Has it occurred to you that teas are shipped down to us from the interior between August and November; that just so much tea and no more is in the market; and that as no ships can leave before November, owing to the monsoon, and can make only one round trip a year—"

"Excuse me," Clark disdained the sarcasm fired at him. "I happen to know that more and more tea is coming down from the interior, as new plantations come into bearing, and new treaty ports are open. Now, if we had ships that cut off a month from the passage home, and another month from the out passage, we'd have something."

"We would," said Abner Perkins. He rose and took Clark's arm, and led him to the window. Before them the terrace of the American factory extended to the river, and at the anchorage were grouped a dozen ships in plain sight.

"Look at 'em," said old Abner. Clark obeyed. They were "country ships," East India Company's bottoms, broadly built, with full bluff bows; beautiful ships of teak, glistening like men of war.

"The finest ships in the world, Bob," said Abner Perkins. "And ours are mod-

eled on them. The finest, safest, stoutest ships in the world."

"And the slowest," said Clark. "I'd like to see a ship built to carry tea only—a ship that could make the passage home in ninety days or less."

Abner Perkins snorted. "Neither you nor I nor our children or grandchildren will ever see such a miracle as that, my boy. By the way, we've been offered some large quantities of the very best Campoi, Bohea and Young Hyson by an outside merchant named Hung Qua—a stranger around here. Do you know anything about him?"

Bob Clark turned. "Yes; he comes from Fukien. I heard some interesting gossip about him last night. If I were you, I'd let his stuff alone."

Old Abner frowned, and scratched his grizzled beard.

"I'm about to bid against the Dutch company for the whole lot."

Clark smiled. "This fellow has something new, I understand. You've seen the samples, even some of the chests, eh? He faces the chests with blue and yellow paper, which heightens the brilliance of the tea; and I believe you'd find a lot of chopped elm-leaves mixed with the tea, not to mention iron filings in the powder at the bottom."

"Great heavens!" exclaimed Abner, staring. "Why, Bob, such things have never been heard of! Such dishonesty is impossible."

"That's why this Hung Qua isn't a *hong* merchant and never will be," said Clark. "You deal with our regular merchants, and you know what you're getting—on their word alone. Well, some of the lads from elsewhere are cutting into a good thing, and they're going to spoil it, that's all. Times are changing."

"If—if that's the case," grunted Abner, "you've done me a good day's turn. I'll look into it."

He looked into it, and did no business with the gentleman from Fukien.

BOB CLARK picked up young Tan E late that afternoon, took him into his skiff, and they ran about the river hither and yon.

Young Tan was a bright fellow, quick to learn, eager to absorb foreign ways and things. Educated in the classical Chinese style, he was an expert draftsman, an artist with pen or brush. Bob Clark could not draw even a caricature, and regretted keenly his lack of talent.

They passed among foreign ships, Clark exchanging greetings with many a seaman he knew. Often he had talked with these men, always on the one subject, so that good-natured jests were flung at him from more than one ship.

"Hello, there! Found what'll make a ship go faster yet?"

Crack-brained, many of them called him—these bronzed and bearded seamen who had sailed the world. Nothing could cut time from a ship's voyage except more and more canvas, which was an impossibility; most of these ships carried all they could bear.

Tan listened to him, pointed out various kinds of junks, and made absolutely futile suggestions. Finally they landed at the *hong* merchant's residence, three or four miles west. Clark was spending the evening with Tan and his sister.

LIKE the residences of all such merchants, this was a veritable palace—an enormous estate comprising gardens, small lakes, a dozen buildings of various kinds, servants innumerable. Since the fortune of such a trader often ran into the scores of millions of dollars, this imperial luxury was to be expected. The unusual feature here was that a foreign devil from the land of the flowery flag was taken in practically as a member of the family.

Chu met them—a glimmering, agile girl whose feet were disgracefully large to native eyes; a girl delicate and eager, aflame with the joy of life. She welcomed them with mock formality, burst into a peal of laughter, and escorted them to a tea-house overlooking the river and the sunset. Here servants had brought pillows and gay mats, trays of food and sweetmeats, charcoal pots to keep the wine and tea hot. The three settled down to a leisurely meal that would last for hours, while servants came from time to time with fresh courses.

To Clark, it was all like some dream of restful paradise. These two were his friends; this shimmering Pearl, this girl beside him, was even more. All the poetry of his nature leaped out at her and around her, and he knew that she loved him—and that it was all impossible. Not from his standpoint, perhaps, but from hers. Marriage to a foreign devil was simply out of all reckoning.

As they talked, Tan told of the jests flung at Clark from foreign ships; and amid their laughter, Pearl gave him a puzzled look.

"Make a ship go faster? How?"

"That's the question," Clark said ruefully. "I don't know how. But there must be a way. There must be a reason behind it all. More canvas? That's given me many a headache; no hope there, I fear."

Pearl reached out for the hot wine, and poured it anew into the tiny cups of mottled jade. As she replaced it, something fell from her robes with a tinkle. She went white; for an instant her eyes met those of her brother in a swift, silent exchange of glances.

Bob Clark, oblivious to all this, leaned forward and picked up the knife—a pretty little knife with a handle of gold and green jade.

"I thought you said once," he observed, "that gold and jade together were most unlucky."

"Only if one thinks so." And the girl forced a laugh.

Clark played with the knife abstractedly, thumbing the keen sliver of steel. Almost at their feet was an arm of water, a little reach of the lake, in which gold and silver fish darted about. The girl, turning from the probing glances of Tan, took a stick and swished it through the water idly. Suddenly she turned to Clark.

"The knife—give me the knife! Now, look!"

She cut the water with the blade, and met his puzzled frown.

"Well?" he said, smiling.

"Look!" She took the stick, swished it, then followed suit with the knife. "You see? Water holds anything back. The knife cuts through it faster than the stick—it is sharp! If a ship had a prow like a knife—"

A sharp exclamation burst from Clark. In this instant the clipper ship had been born.

The thought burned in his brain. Even while the moon slipped up the sky and he sat there with Pearl beside him and his friend Tan kindly oblivious, Clark could not forget that flash of conception, of inspiration. A prow like a knife!

It did not occur to him to wonder why Pearl should be carrying that slim blade.

THE night was magic, the moon glinting across the rippling river, a drift of song coming from the flower-boats; the three of them lost in the immensity of the stars and each other. Bob Clark felt this girl wakening in his brain, as always, the kindling spark of impulse, of

dreams, of things vaguely glimpsed. He who so hated the harsh world around, could find peace here with her.

Bob Clark went home again. For two days he worked furiously in the office, more furiously in his private quarters; he hardly slept, but slaved far into each night, carving and cutting, shaving away at a tiny boat-hull.

ON the third morning he was summoned to the *hong* of Tan E; the merchant wanted to speak with him. He went to the office on the creek and found his friend Tan, who admitted him.

"This afternoon, Tan!" he exclaimed eagerly. "I want you to help me."

"Gladly; we shall dine again at the tea-house," the young Chinese replied, but more gravely than usual. "My honorable father is expecting you."

Clark greeted the old man with polite formulas. A weak man in many ways, though shrewd in business, Tan E was not unsuited to his name, which meant *Solitary Idea*. He questioned the young foreign devil pleasantly about business, about his personal affairs, and finally asked whether Clark did not want to go back home.

"Of course, some day," said Clark. "First I must make my fortune."

"How much money would that require?" asked Tan E, and Clark laughed.

"Oh, hard to say—fifty thousand dollars, perhaps!"

"I will place it to your credit today," said Tan E gravely. "You may leave on the ship which departs day after tomorrow. It will give me great pleasure."

Clark, dumfounded, could not believe his senses. Yet it was true; the blank yellow features twitched nervously before his gaze, his astonished questions. Such generosity was not unknown among the *hong* merchants. One of them, not long before, had torn up promissory notes amounting to seventy thousand dollars, in order that an American merchant might return home with a clear slate.

"I have learned of your honorable ambition to build a new type of ship," said Tan E. "Now it is accomplished. All is settled. We are friends."

Clark went back to his own factory as in a dream, walking on air. He burst in upon old Abner Perkins with his amazing news; words bubbled from him.

"It's incredible!" he concluded. "Fifty thousand dollars, sir—mine! Think of what it means. I can clear out, I can go to work on my ideas for a ship; I've

just got them in shape, I'm going to see about the sketches with Tan today. He can put what I have in mind into concrete designs. And I can leave with the *Eagle* day after tomorrow!"

"Aye, and a good thing," grunted old Abner.

Clark stared at him.

"Why, sir, what do you mean?"

"I've been aiming for a word or two with you, Bob," said the other grimly. "No need of it now."

"Let's have it, sir. Have I done anything amiss in the office?"

"No, but plenty out of it. Tan E is being disgraced far and wide by your idling with his daughter. The same dalliance is disgracing this factory, your own name, and the good fame of all Americans. The Chinese don't care for any foreign alliance; and we don't either. Is that plain?"

White to the lips, Bob Clark kept his temper.

"Very plain, sir. I sha'n't argue the matter—"

"There's no argument," said Abner Perkins. "You're relieved of duties, lad. I'll take passage aboard the *Eagle* for you; enjoy yourself tomorrow—your last day in Canton. And by the way, I'll have private letters home to entrust to you."

Clark went to his own quarters and sank into a seat, staring blankly before him. Fifty thousand dollars—not from friendship or benevolence; he was being bought off and sent home by Tan E. Marriage? Devil take marriage! The New England conscience and the Chinese instinct alike would repudiate such a marriage; a love-affair might be endured, but marriage was absurd to contemplate.

THIS afternoon, then, would be the last time. But Tan would advise him; if appeal to the old merchant were possible, Tan would know. And there was always the chance of stealing Pearl away, of taking her with him. Captain Grimsby of the *Eagle* was a good old scout. A word with him might settle everything.

Take the money of Tan E—and steal his daughter too? That was not the Chinese notion of honor. The money was being given him to avert disgrace, in native eyes.

With an oath, Clark shoved the whole problem aside for the moment and went back to his toy ship-hull. He had the thing more or less the way he wanted it, and now he made some crude sketches, to help guide Tan's pen and brush.

At lunch he found himself the envy of everyone in the factory; word of his good luck had spread like wildfire, and congratulations overwhelmed him. The irony of it left him grim-eyed and bitter.

WHEN he picked up his friend Tan that afternoon, the two sat in silence while Clark sent the skiff upstream. He avoided the ships at anchor, avoided the other skiffs and boats of the merchants who were airing themselves on the water. As they drew near their destination, Clark suddenly broke out in an explosion of all his pent-up emotions, desperately seeking advice and help from his friend.

Tan listened to him gravely, and at length shook his head.

"You should know better," he replied. "What you ask is impossible; it is contrary to the rites, to the customs of our people and of yours. Already my father has lost much face. He will not even discuss the matter with you."

"But—but Pearl loves me!" exclaimed Clark.

"That may be; but she is going to marry Li Han the merchant. It was arranged this morning; as soon as a favorable day is set, the betrothal will take place."

Clark stared at him, read something inflexible in the saffron features, and with a little groan said no more.

They landed and went up to the summer-house where Chu had everything ready. At the first glance Clark saw that she knew everything; her gayety was only a brave shadow of itself, and her wan pallor betrayed the inner ache and emptiness. When he told how her suggestion had given him the idea he needed, she wakened into a little flutter of joy and eagerness, for a moment. Then she drooped again, pathetically.

Clark turned to his friend. Before Tan he laid his crude sketches, the model of his ship's hull; he explained everything in detail. Tan, who had ink and brushes and bamboo pens at hand, began to make sketches with a clever hand. Clark corrected them, and pointed out the details he desired changed, while the sunset flamed and died. At length Tan had everything in his head and on paper.

"Tonight," he said, "I will make proper sketches, my friend. I'll send them to you in the morning. Let me borrow this model ship until then. The sails will be like those of the *Eagle*, you say? I'll copy them and make a picture of the ship as she will look under sail."



"Tomorrow night, half an hour after sunset, I'll come for you. Be here."

So the matter was laid aside.

Pearl touched the strings of her lute and sang them fragments of song, but the songs were sad things, and lifeless. Thin clouds veiled the high moon, and the oppression that weighed upon all three left them listless and silent, ill at ease, dispirited. Clark at length stirred and rose to depart. Tan went down to the boat; it was his one chance for a word with Pearl. He caught her hand, slipped his arm about her shoulders, felt her yield to his embrace, and spoke softly.

"Tomorrow night, half an hour after sunset, I'll come for you. Be here, beside the little lake."

He could feel her trembling to his words, caught a half-choked murmur, and so went down to his skiff and departed down the darkling river. He had drawn blank here; now to see whether Grimsby would help him out. If not—well, that contingency spelled only frantic desperation. Grimsby must!

LUCK favored him. He was in his own quarters at the factory. A package had just come; opening it, he found his ship model and half a dozen sketches Tan had made. Beautiful things, showing exactly what Clark wanted shown, with one of a full-rigged ship which would have made any seaman smile, but which pointed the changes in hull construction excellently. These were spread over his bed when one of the clerks came

to tell him that Captain Grimsby was below.

Clark hurried down to the main office, found Grimsby with Abner Perkins, and discovered that his passage was all arranged. Grimsby was rather a young man, still in his thirties, with a salt-bitten countenance and a twinkling eye. Two of his men had just deposited a huge and heavy mail-sack near old Abner's desk, and there was much joking about it as the two men sipped their rum and invited Clark to join them. Before night, all the mail that the *Eagle* had brought out would be distributed.

This mail-sack had been carefully held up ever since her arrival, as was customary. Each skipper bringing out mail from home, guarded it jealously until the hour of departure, lest rival agents and merchants receive orders or instructions should spoil his chances of a cargo; also, his own agent must get home news first and ahead of all rivals.

WHEN Captain Grimsby departed, Clark went from the office with him.

"Captain, will you come to my room for a few moments?" he asked. "I want to speak with you privately—as man to man."

"Aye, with a will," said Grimsby heartily, and winked. "Some private commercial venture that'll need my help to squeeze past the Imperial customs people downriver, eh?"

"A venture, yes, but not a commercial one."

They came to Clark's room. Captain Grimsby took a seat, lit his pipe, and listened to what Bob Clark had to say. Then a slow frown gathered in his keen eyes.

"A risky business—for me," he said finally. "If it were learned that I slid your lass out of here, I'd run into hot water next voyage. I fear—"

"Ten thousand dollars, Captain," said Clark quietly. Grimsby's eyes widened. "Ten thousand, before we sail. I'll have Mr. Perkins make out the papers. Does that cover your risk?"

Grimsby put out his horny paw.

"Done with you—and be damned if I'll take your money in such a cause! I'll do it and run my own risk. Get her aboard tonight after dark, and leave the rest to me. I know that mandarin downriver who handles the customs; I'll slip him a hundred dollars, and you can pay that back to me, and passage for the lass—no more. . . Hello! What's all this?"

Grimsby had caught sight of the model and sketches spread over the bed. In a glow of excitement, gratitude, eagerness, Bob Clark broke into quick explanations of his great idea. The skipper listened at first with keen interest.

"Look at the model, now," and Clark continued, as he showed the shape of the hull. "Designed to cut through the water like a knife—you see? None of your bluff bows that beat the waves, shaped like a barrel, but concave bows and a sharp stem. This carries her breadth of beam farther aft than is usual, but you see how the quarters and stern are lightened by rounding up the ends of the main transom—"

He was interrupted by an explosion, a gale of laughter. Captain Grimsby fairly held his sides, until able to speak.

"Man, man, it's a madman's dream! Forget it, or you're liable to be clapped into jail as a lunatic. Concave bows, says you? Why, she's a ship turned inside out, clear against the laws of nature! She looks pretty, I grant you; but take a seaman's word for it, such lines would never do in practice. Why, such a vessel would have a tremendous dead-rise, tremendous! And she's positively wall-sided. Your proportions are all off, too. That amount of beam to her length would never be safe. Speed? Aye; she'd take herself and her crew to hell faster than any craft ever yet built! No, no, Clark; you're no seaman. Stick to your last, my friend, and don't play with such crazy notions as this. Get your duffel sent aboard, and I'll expect you tonight."

LEFT alone, Clark sat disconcerted and appalled. Arguments would not have shaken him, but ridicule shattered all his hopes. Grimsby was a friend, risking everything to help him; and yet Grimsby had roared with laughter. This great idea of his—why, all it evoked from a man who knew, was mirth!

Well, his dreams had failed; what of it? His life remained to live. With an oath of irritation, he stuffed the plans and the model into his duffel-bag. Now he had something more important to think about. A few more hours, and the broad horizon of life would open to him and the woman he loved! And Grimsby would marry them, had already consented to do it. Everything was turning out simply and beautifully for them.

He forgot only one thing—the deep and terrible filial piety in which the Chinese were reared.

THE FIRST CLIPPER

When the sun that evening dipped down to the horizon, Bob Clark was idly rowing his skiff on the river. When the sun had disappeared, he made a cautious approach to the grounds of the far-reaching residence of Tan E; with darkness, he came quietly to the shore. The sky was deepening into full darkness; the pale stars were gleaming and winking, as he drew near to the little summer-house beside the artificial lake.

But Chu was not here.

"PEARL!" he called softly. There was no reply; she was not here at all. He peered to see her shape glimmering across the gardens, but there was no sign of her. As he looked about, his eye caught something white beside the pool. He picked it up—a strip of white paper, the color of sadness and mourning, on which were drawn Chinese characters. The paper had been weighted down.

Clark took a box of phosphorus matches from his pocket and struck one. Having a fair knowledge of Chinese, he could read the characters; in fact, he knew this quotation from the classics:

A Lifetime of Remorse cannot be called Happiness

The flare of the match died out. Clark repeated the words over; he realized this was a message intended for him. He stooped and picked up the object that had held down the paper. It was smooth and slippery to his hand; it was the gold and jade sheath of the little knife Chu had carried.

Then she had refused to cover her father and her family with disgrace. This was what the message meant. Never could she have forgiven herself, trained as she was in filial piety, for the shame her flight would bring upon Tan E in native eyes.

Clark turned away, in mad passionate impulse to seek out Chu and plunge into swift argument, convince her, show her how the truth lay as he saw it. He took a few steps—and came to a halt. His heart leaped. There beneath a drooping willow was a figure, sitting motionless, head bowed.

"Pearl!" The word broke from him. He hastened forward, but had no response. He parted the light drooping branches of the willow and fell on his knees beside her. His hand went out—

His fingers touched the jade haft of a little knife protruding from her bosom.

"I WARNED you." The voice of Dr. Kung roused me again to reality with its gentle, almost mournful insistence. "I warned you that the story was not what you would term a happy one; although to a Chinese it is very beautiful and ends as it should end. Indeed, the story of the girl Chu is still told in Canton as a model of filial piety."

I stirred uneasily. That was one way of looking at it, of course; it reminded me of sly old Brantome's argument as to whether maid, wife or widow were best fitted to enjoy love.

"But what about Clark?" I asked. "What became of him?"

"Nobody knows. He did not, however, go aboard the *Eagle*. When that ship passed down the river in the morning, she sighted his skiff floating empty, with the bows stove in. Whether he committed suicide, or while rowing in mad blind grief was run down by some junk, was never known. . . .

"It is not hard to imagine," he went on reflectively, "that his effects were unclaimed when the ship got home, perhaps were sold, and came into the hands of others. Perhaps the model and sketches came into the hands of the man Griffith, who is said to have designed and built the first clipper ship, four years later. I do not know. One can never be certain about such things. But it is plausible."

Plausible, yes; it all depended on how much truth lay in this story he had been telling me. I challenged him.

"How do you know what happened a hundred years ago in Canton? And what are those sketches of yours—they're certainly not the ones made for Clark?"

DR. KUNG smiled. "No; these are copies that Tan made for himself at the time."

"How did you get them?" I demanded.

"In the most logical way possible," he said. "You see, it was not customary for an honorable family to use the family name in commercial affairs. The commercial name of Tan E, the *hong* merchant, was very famous; but few people among the foreign devils knew his family name."

"And that was—"

"Kung," said my friend, with his beatific smile. "Kung. He was my great-grandfather. That is how I know what happened a hundred years ago in Canton, and how the first clipper ship came to be dreamed about."

Another story in this fine series will appear in the next, the May, issue.

Rough Shod

This deeply interesting story of the modern West deals with a war between a cattle baron and an editor who wouldn't scare.



By LUKE SHORT

WHEN a soft knock came on the street door up front, Cole Preftake paused in his work; for a long moment, he looked down absently at the stick of type he held in his hand; then he lifted his tired gaze, peering beyond the tight circle of light from the overhead lamp through the gloom of the shop to the front door. This couldn't be it, he was thinking. He laid the stick on the edge of the type-case, his glance seeking the sack under the make-up table. Beneath it was his gun. Rubbing his hands on his soiled apron, he made his way past a clutter of printing gear to the partition rail, passed his desk and unbolted the door, easing it wide. When the woman stepped through, he only said, "Oh," and then bowed a little.

"I have only one light. Will you come back?" he asked.

She nodded. He bolted the door again and led the way back to the light; and while he cleared off the rough bench for her to sit on, he decided he would not pretend ignorance of why she was here.

Before she sat down, she looked around her at this mass of black machinery, and then looked at him and said: "The smell—what is it? I've smelled it before."

"Ink. When you get your *Advocate* each week."

"Of course."

The bench was directly under the working-light, so that when she sat down,

the light beat pitilessly on her. And he was surprised that this light, which made pouches under his own weary eyes, and gave his square face an unpleasant pallor, should not change her face any. The shadows it made were small, as if her clean and modeled features held not the smallest distortion. The light did not pale her face, which was wind-flushed and held a sprinkle of tiny freckles across the bridge of her nose.

Looking at him, she said slowly: "Are you well? You have no color."

He stepped back out of the light, and leaned against the make-up slab, folding his arms.

"I've missed some sleep lately," he said briefly, and waited.

"You know who I am, don't you?"

He nodded, a kind of patient courtesy in his somber face.

"I think so. I have seen that same sort of hair on Dave Younghusband." She was wearing it in a braided coronet, and it was thick and as pale as moonlight, with a bright strange sheen.

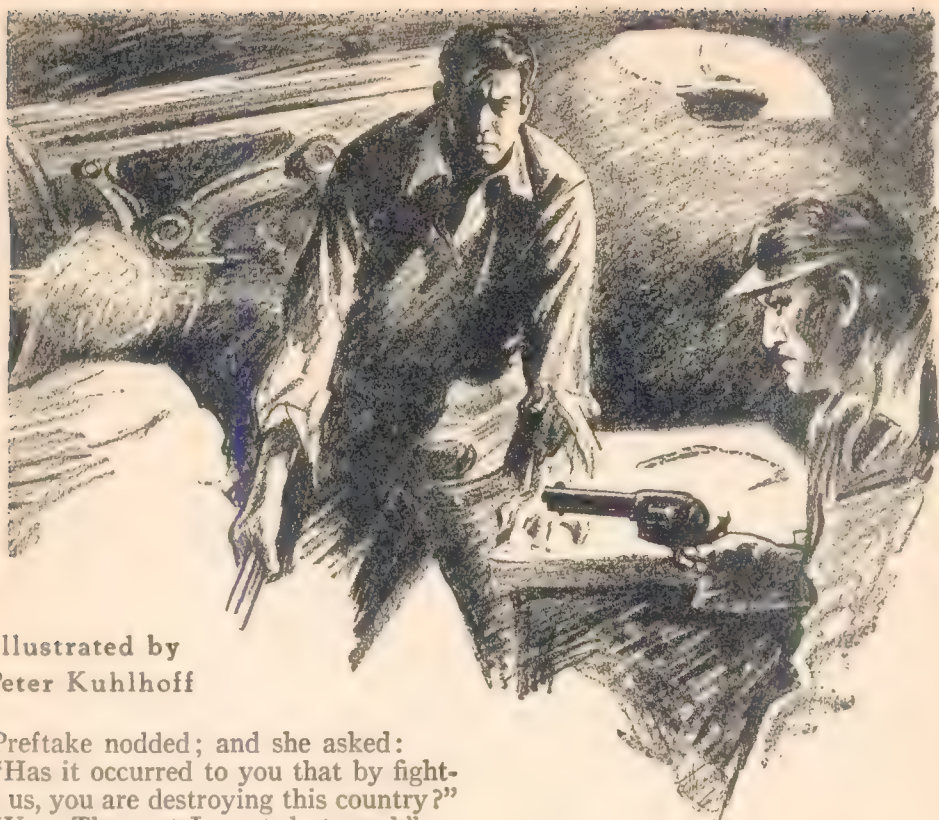
"Martha Younghusband," she said, and did not smile. "I rode in this afternoon."

"Yes."

"My father didn't send me," she volunteered. "You've got to believe that."

"I do. That is not Dave Younghusband's way of fighting."

"Ah," she said quickly. "Then you think he will fight—we will fight," she corrected herself.



Illustrated by
Peter Kuhlhoff

Preftake nodded; and she asked:

"Has it occurred to you that by fighting us, you are destroying this country?"

"Yes. The part I want destroyed."

"Haven't we got a right to live?" she asked swiftly, quietly. "Is it just for the excitement of it that you are doing this? We hire riders, pay taxes, and keep a law in this country, don't we?"

"So did the feudal barons."

She said: "They told me you would be reasonable, that you would talk without getting angry. They said that you would listen to other people. Will you?"

"Yes."

"And you will listen to me?"

"Yes." He took the pipe from his mouth and leaned forward a little. "On one condition: that you will listen to me, too. I've tried to talk to Dave and Jeff Younghusband, but they're above that. There is a time that comes with success when a man thinks he doesn't have to explain any more—that he can ride roughshod over other people. I would like to talk to one of you Younghusbands."

While he was speaking, she picked up the wry and humorously bitter flavor of his way of talking, but she had been warned of this too, so that it did not anger her. She put her elbows on her knees now, like a man, and crossed her legs, and she looked at him level-eyed.

She said: "All right. Our part of it is very simple. Dad and Uncle Jeff and Myron Sammons came in this country thirty years ago. They starved and sac-

rificed and went thirsty. They lost their wives and their children, and there were Indians and drought and floods and raids, but they didn't run. They fought, and they planned, and they were stubborn; and each year saw a little increase in their herds." She paused, and he nodded attentively. "Don't you think that deserves a reward? They fought the country and broke it for other men. Now you are trying to break them, aren't you?"

"BEFORE I answer that, let me tell it," he replied quietly, and began: "Some thirty years ago Dave and Jeff Younghusband and Myron Sammons came into this country together. In all the fifty-mile length of this basin, they found only a band of Indians. As you say, they did starve and fight and sacrifice, and they held all they could. That was thirty years ago, wasn't it?"

"Yes."

"Then there were three men and their families here. Today there is a town of two hundred people; and a hundred more on ranches. But the Basin still measures fifty miles. Where three men lived and prospered thirty years ago, three hundred are trying to, today—and can't."

"But must you take away from Dad to give to them?" she asked passionately.

He waited until the echo of her words had died in the still shop, letting the sharpness of them rebuke her, and then he said: "No man is taking away what they have." And now his voice took on an undertone of savage protest. "But is there no end to a man's greed?"

"Greed!" she replied swiftly. "We have herds! They must have range! If you take the range from us, then you take the herds from us! Unless we lease these Indian lands you are trying to keep from us, we are ruined!"

"Then cut your herds down," he said curtly. "Unless these small ranchers get the Indian lands, they are ruined too. And they haven't a hundred thousand other acres to fall back on, like Dave Younghusband."

"But isn't that taking away what we already own, what Dad has slaved and fought for?"

"It is not," he said bluntly. "Cattle have never been more important than men." He said more gently: "Tell your father that a man cannot be God on this earth—not if he climbs to his heaven on the necks of a hundred other men."

SHE rose now, holding her gloves loosely in her hand, and he could see that her convictions were unchanged.

"The paper comes out tomorrow, doesn't it?"

"Yes."

"And will it carry what people say it will?"

He said: "Yes. A call to all those poor devils to bring in everything they own, all the money and goods they can gather, so that on Monday we can stand before the government agent and bid one cent more an acre than Dave Younghusband for these Indian lands."

"And if you can't match his bid?" she asked.

"We didn't go into this blindly. I know how much your father and uncle and Myron Sammons can afford to bid. We only want one of the three blocks open." He smiled crookedly now, and it was almost apologetic, as if to excuse what he was about to say. "We will bid them up on two blocks so high they cannot afford to take the third."

"But that is spiteful and vicious."

"Yes. It's blackmailing too. You can tell your father about it, so he'll be forewarned."

She nodded, still-faced, her eyes curious now, and searching. Then she said slowly: "You believe in yourself, don't you?"

"Yes. In a man's right to live, too."

She added dryly: "And in any man's right to own a printing-press and raise a rabble according to his whim."

"Rabbles don't rise unless they are goaded and have a leader." He said calmly and without anger: "Sometimes I think that is the finest use of a press—to bring justice to strange corners."

"And to bring—"

A racketing, imperative knock on the front door cut into her speech and silenced her. Lips parted a little in surprise, she looked at him and saw that he had not moved, had not even seemed to hear.

"Who is that?" she asked softly.

"Your father, I would guess," he told her, watching her.

"But he mustn't find me here," she said quickly, looking about her. "Is there a back door?"

"It is locked, and my printer has the key." He motioned to the shadowed back corner of the shop where a huge closet reached from floor to ceiling. "You can hide in there."

He waited without moving until she had made her way back through the tangle of machinery to the closet, and then he lounged erect, looking again at the tow-sack which covered the gun. This, then, was what he had known would come, and he wondered for an instant if she had known it too, and had tried to stop it before it bred the violence that was inevitable. Walking again to the door, he straightened against the weariness that was drowning him, telling himself that after this night it was done.

Even as the second door-shaking knock came, he unbolted the door and swung it wide, while the first of the three men, Dave Younghusband, entered. Preflake gestured back toward the light, saying nothing.

IN Dave Younghusband's walk as he made his way back through the shop there was no haste. He was a giant of a man in a shapeless black suit, with a shock of pale hair that contrasted strangely with the deep mahogany of his seamed face. He moved with the deliberation of a man upon whom events and other men wait. Jeffrey Younghusband, his brother, was a foot shorter, eighty pounds lighter, a bantam of a man with an angular, close-knit face and with an air of unconscious truculence about him. Sammons, the last through the door, was only a shrewd storekeeper whose fortunes

had risen with the Younghusbands because of proximity, a sallow, spare man with a counting-desk pallor.

Preftake followed them into the circle of light and said: "I'd ask you to sit down, but this won't take long, I suppose."

Under the flare of the light which his head almost touched, Dave Younghusband looked around the shop with an air of regal and mild curiosity. His hands were on his hips, so that his coat was parted, showing the shell-belt hanging slantwise to his hip, and the gun that sagged there.

He said without looking at Preftake: "No. Not much." Then he settled his gaze on Preftake. "I hear you are organizing the basin squatters to bid for the Indian lands."

"That's right," Preftake said.

"Why?" Younghusband's voice was patient, curious; but in his eyes was a quiet mocking contempt that was good-naturedly ruthless.

Preftake said: "Because they need range, and that is the only way they can get it, by banding and outbidding you for a block of it."

"Is that all?" Younghusband persisted mildly.

"Not all. Because you've hogged and bought up all the grass in the country. These men must live."

But big Dave Younghusband had lost interest. He was looking over the equipment; and without turning his head he said: "You don't look like a man that could be bought."

"I can't."

Sammons said: "What do you make off an issue of the *Advocate*, Preftake?"

"Enough to pay a printer, meet the installment on my press, and eat fairly well five days out of the week."

Sammons smiled now, almost laughed. "Not a thousand dollars, then."

"Nowhere near it."

"Would it be worth fifteen hundred for you to skip this next issue?"

Preftake smiled too, and said: "Not fifteen thousand."

Jeff Younghusband looked at Dave, but Dave ignored him. He said: "You could get this around by word of mouth. Why don't you?"

"You've already guessed that," Preftake said. "People believe what they see in print. Don't ask me why. Besides, it would take three weeks of riding to see them all." This was sparring, he knew—a prelude to what they had come to say;



She said: "Has it occurred to you that by fighting us, you are destroying this country?"

and when it came, he knew it would come from big Dave.

He was not surprised then to see Dave walk out of the circle of lamplight and look at the job press as he passed it. He stopped before the tool-box against the wall, then reached down and brought out a heavy pipe-wrench, which he hefted, almost absently. They watched him in silence as he walked back into the light, the wrench hanging easily from his hand.

"I'll take a man's word," he said mildly. "I want yours that you'll drop this business now."

Preftake only shook his head.

Dave looked at him long, then said: "This country got on twenty years without a newspaper. It can again." He turned to look at the flat-bed press. "Is that what you print the *Advocate* on?"

Sammons said: "That's it, Dave."

"This will likely cost me a fine," Dave said. "They'll make me pay for the repairs, too." He hefted the wrench and said: "Can I break it anywhere that won't cost much to fix?"

"Wreck it," Jeff Younghusband said curtly.

Preftake, who had been leaning against the make-up slab, straightened up; and immediately he felt Sammons jab something into his side. He looked down and saw it was a gun.

"Easy," Sammons said.

Dave Younghusband walked over and regarded the press, the wrench hanging from his hand.

"Wait," Preftake said quietly, and he smiled a little. When big Dave looked up, he went on: "If you want to stop publication, why don't you take my type?" He pointed to the type-case, a huge hinged flat box with innumerable small pigeonholes mounted on a slanting wood frame. He sensed the absurdity of this, his discussing with them the best way to cripple him; but underneath his mocking and helpless calm was a knowledge that this brief and desperate minute held his life for him. So he said nothing more, but only drew the pipe from his apron pocket again and lighted the heel of it, not looking at big Dave. When he flicked out the match, Dave said: "I could do that, yes."

"That press is the only one between Dodge and Salt Lake. It cost a fortune to get here, and will take eight months to fix." He pointed with his pipe to the type-case. "All that type will go into two sacks. Take it with you. After you've robbed the country again, bring it back."

"For you to howl to heaven with," Jeff Younghusband said dryly.

Preftake nodded. "Yes. I'll do that. But it will be too late."

FOR a moment no one spoke, and then Sammons said: "You can print hand-bills."

"On the job press only. Wreck that if you want. Wreck it and take my type, and you'll have me hamstrung."

"Wreck them both," Jeff Younghusband said.

Big Dave walked slowly back to the lamplight, and he said: "Dump that type in a tow-sack."

"Are you going to leave that press whole?" Jeff Younghusband asked hotly. "He'll have the whole country on the prod in a week!"

Preftake watched big Dave turn his head slowly and look at his brother. "This country has been fighting the Younghusbands for fifteen years, but never with a newspaper. We've fixed that. Another fight don't matter much. It will be too late to do anything." He looked at Preftake. "Son, I don't want

to wreck this place. If we took the type for that other press too, could you run it?"

"No; but the type's pretty heavy."

"Where is it?"

PREFTAKE told him. While Jeff Younghusband emptied the contents of the type-case on the floor and swept it into two tow-sacks, big Dave ransacked the wall-case containing the big printing blocks and type. The biggest alphabet, carved in wooden blocks six inches high, he left in their place, knowing a single alphabet would be useless. Then he walked over to the galley on the slab and scooped the type from it into the sack. When he saw that the sack would be too heavy to carry with ease, he looked around for another, and saw the one beneath the make-up slab.

He reached down and picked it up and saw the gun lying beneath it. He said nothing, merely plugged out the shells in it, and laid it on the bench, and put the shells in his pocket.

Jeff and Sammons were waiting for him when he finished. He gave Sammons one of the lightest sacks and said: "Put up the gun."

"This is a mistake, Dave," Jeff said.

Big Dave ignored him, and turned to Preftake. "I wouldn't look for this stuff until Tuesday, anyway."

Without saying more, he turned and started for the door, Jeff and Sammons following. Preftake rubbed a half-clenched fist over his burning eyes; and when he heard the door shut, he did not move. Only when he heard the click of the girl's riding-boots on the floor approach and cease, did he look up.

"This is what I was trying to save you," she said simply. "You are a stubborn man."

"More stubborn than you know," he said quietly; and she could make nothing from his faint and weary smile.

"You can't fight them," she said impersonally. "I have seen men try, and I have seen them broken. They were gentle with you."

"Too gentle," he said quietly.

As he finished speaking, the front door swung open, and Riley, the printer, hurried in. He began talking as soon as the door was closed, and he had not spoken before Preftake knew he had not seen the girl.

Riley called: "It worked, Cole! I saw them go out with it! Did they get the hidden—"



"I'll take a man's word," he said mildly. "I want yours that you'll drop this business now."

Preftake half turned and said: "Watch your talk!" sharply, loudly. Riley, a bald and spare-framed Irishman with a great sad face, stopped short at the rail. He could see the girl now half-turned to him, and he recognized her as Dave Younghusband's girl. He walked slowly into the light, his eyes wary and cautious.

Martha turned to Preftake, and there was a light of understanding in her eyes; and Preftake was glad she had not tried to conceal that she understood. "Hidden?" she asked quietly. "You have hidden some type. You can still print it!"

Riley said dolefully: "May the good God strike me dead if I saw her, Cole, and may He strike me dumb anyway!"

"It's no matter," Preftake said slowly to her. "I'm sorry you had to hear. I'm even sorrier you have to watch us go through with it."

He had suddenly come alive, it seemed; and he moved with a sure and vital alertness. He pulled the bench over closer to the type-case and said curtly: "Sit here, please."

Martha sat down. She realized she was a prisoner until they were finished; and now she glimpsed the hard and ruthless determination that was driving this man. She said: "I'm not to go?"

"Not until we are finished," he said calmly, and added to Riley: "It's on the top shelf where you left it."

Riley went to the cupboard and returned with two sticks of type wrapped in an oily rag. Preftake took it and set

it on the make-up slab within the form. Then he said: "Find sticks, blocks, metal, anything to wedge that lead in the middle of the page. And get me the saw."

She watched Riley go about his business, while Preftake went over to the rack holding the single remaining alphabet of poster type. He reached down four letters, suddenly laid them on the floor and went up and bolted the front door again. Riley was waiting for his return and handed him the saw.

And now Preftake brought the four blocks over to the bench, and Martha said: "Do you want me to move?"

"No. Stay where you are."

She watched him saw each block in two, cutting parallel with the face and about an inch behind it. He worked with a quiet fury while Riley dug out a lantern and lighted it and hung it from the wire over the press. When Preftake had finished his job, he took the letters over to the form, and there ensued fifteen minutes of whittling and measuring and careful tapping with a heavy wooden mallet, as the galley was slowly locked up in the form.

It was taken to the press, and she watched them work there until she could stand her curiosity no longer. She got up and went near it to see them work. Some of their wordless excitement caught her too, and she found herself looking on with stilled breath.

The form, lying on its flat bed, looked meaningless to her. Inside its rectangle,



"You know the families these should reach."

she saw a much smaller rectangle which seemed only a cluster of black orderly smudges, but which she knew was the type. On three sides of it, and deeper in the form, were bits of metal and wood wedged in a crazy pattern so as to hold the type firm. On the fourth side, she saw the four letters from the poster blocks, but she could not read them.

When the galley was locked in, Riley said tersely:

"It'll be the very devil to ink."

And then they began to work the press, Riley levering the gears that swung the big jaw down onto the paper which Preftake fed onto the galley. He was scowling; and after each impression he would signal to Riley, who stilled the lever, while Preftake tapped on the letter blocks with a mallet and inked it afresh. Fifteen times they did this, and each time Preftake would scan the page and drop it face down on the floor.

When he was satisfied, they swung into the rhythm of the work, Preftake feeding the paper in and out, and inking, while Riley worked the press.

Martha watched them until the monotony of it almost hypnotized her; then she walked slowly up to the growing stack of finished sheets.

She took one, and Riley stopped the press at a signal from Preftake. The paper she held was a long rectangular sheet which was not yet folded in half. Of the four pages, only one was printed.

Across the top of the page, in bold, black thunder six inches high were four letters which spelled—

GRAB

Below it, she read the summons. In simple, blunt sentences, each one driven home with sledge-hammer English, she first read the legend that her father, her uncle and Myron Sammons had this night sought to smother the right of free speech.

She looked up at Preftake. "You knew they planned coming here?"

"I guessed it," he said.

SHE read on. The second paragraph told why the attempt had been made. And then it swung into the plea for the ranchers of Whitewater Basin to unite, so that on Monday next, their meager resources would be pooled in a last and desperate effort to lease one block of fifty thousand acres of Indian lands in order that their cattle might live. She saw that whoever had written it had avoided dramatics and fine phrases, and had written only facts—and these facts were more eloquent than eloquence. It was the work of a bitter man so sure of his cause that he let it plead for itself. There was no whining, no sentimentality, nothing but the marshaled facts, each in its separate line of type, without exclamation marks. And it slugged home its story with the raw and unlovely truth. At the end, it asked that the *Advocate* office be considered the headquarters, and that books would be kept and range dealt out in proportion to contributions.

She laid it down and looked at it a long moment, and then raised her eyes to find Preftake watching her.

"You will win," she said.

"Yes."

"Will you get this out tonight?"

When he nodded, she said: "And how long will it take you?"

"Two hours."

"You have not told me that if I give my word to keep this secret, I may go. Don't you trust me?" she asked.

"I thought you would rather not give it," Preftake answered. "I trust you, yes."

"And if I give my word, I can leave?"

"Yes."

"Cole," Riley said gently. When Preftake looked at him, he said: "She's a Younghusband. Are you going to risk the welfare of a hundred men for the word of the likes of her?"

Preftake said: "Her father was willing to take my word. I am willing to take hers if she offers it."

Riley looked long at him; and Preftake saw the pity in his wise and cynical old face. Riley shrugged, said nothing.

"You have my word, I will not tell," Martha said. "May I go?"

Preftake nodded. She left by the rear door, which Riley bolted after her.

When he came back into the light, Preftake watched him, waiting for him to damn him bitterly for a fool. Riley only avoided looking at him and said: "The boys are coming at midnight. We'd best get to work."

They worked for an hour in wordless rhythm. For a while Preftake was not sure whether or not it was his weariness that made the pace of their labor seem so exhausting. But later he knew it was Riley who was stepping up the tempo until they were working with a blind and reckless speed. Finally, when he could bear it no longer, Preftake stopped.

He said quietly, a touch of scorn in his voice: "Scared, Tom?"

It was not in Riley's nature to hide what he thought and he did not now. "Aye," he said deliberately.

"Of the girl?"

"And why not?" Riley blurted out. "She's a Younghusband, and the breed is all alike. They'll ride over us in their rough-shod way, and be damned to us."

IT was on Preftake's tongue to tell him this was none of his business, and that he was hired to print, not advise, but when he looked at Riley, he saw the worry and kindness there. He sighed and rubbed a hand over his face.

"We've got three hundred here. Want to get them out?"

Riley picked up his coat before Preftake's last word had been spoken and he

turned to the back door. "I'll do that. I'll get Frank and Loosh."

While he was gone, Preftake took the heap of printed sheets over to the paper-knife and sheared off the blank half, so that the *Advocate* of this week looked more like a handbill than a newspaper. When Riley returned, he had two boys with him. They split the sheets equally between them, and listened to Preftake's admonition.

"You ride south, Frank; you north, Loosh. You know the families these should reach. When you can, leave four or five at one place, and ask them to ride to the neighbors with them. Forget the subscribers. Take them where they'll do the most good. Leave a dozen in the right stores at Sun Cliff, and another dozen at the Faro Crossing stage station." He pulled some money from his pocket and gave it to the boys. "Stay out till there's none left, if it takes till Sunday. And remember, if anyone stops you, don't pull a gun—run. Right's on our side. We've no need for shooting. Now go on."

AFTER they had gone, Riley's face relaxed, and Preftake wondered if these sleepless nights had so frayed his own nerves that he wanted to curse Riley for a cynical, suspicious and distrustful fool.

They went back to work, this time to turn out the copies which would be distributed around town, and all the time Preftake was fighting off the numbing drowsiness which was drowning him. He thought of the three days and nights he had been in the saddle, hunting out those men he thought would back him, talking, arguing their despair away and in its place leaving a kind of blind courage and hope. Somewhere along the line, he had known, the word of their organization was bound to leak out, and last night he had written his editorial, put it in type and hidden it. For once, he had matched Dave Younghusband's cunning with its own brand.

Martha Younghusband had said he would win. He knew now that he would, but he had been glad to hear her say it and admit defeat. Strangely, he felt no dislike, no distrust of her, in spite of Riley. He thought of her clean, frank face, and her blunt and honest way of speech. And behind it he had recognized that here was a woman who held to a man's code of fighting, a man's honor, and would go down to a man's defeat. And that was well, he thought, for

in the next few days the Younghusbands would taste defeat.

Riley stopped the press, and Preftake looked up at him dully.

"You'll fold up in a minute, Cole," Riley said in kindly reproof.

"I'll stick it out. There's not much more."

"Be careful, then; it would be easy to smash a hand."

They were lost again in the monotony of their work when a knock that was a deep and thunderous hammer sounded on the front door. They looked at each other a long moment, and then Riley said bitterly, softly: "Her word is good, is it?"

The door crashed open then, and they both turned. Preftake said softly: "If you've got a gun, don't use it."

The vast bulk of Dave Younghusband loomed in the front of the shop, and when he walked into the circle of lantern-light, it was not with his usual and majestic unhaste. Behind him was Jeff Younghusband.

Big Dave walked straight to the pile of finished sheets and glanced at one of them.

"Have any like these gone out?" he asked, his voice thick with anger.

"Two hours ago," Preftake replied calmly. "Enough to reach every family in the basin."

"You're licked, Dave," Riley said bluntly. "Don't be a fool twice over."

Big Dave glared at him, clenching and unclenching his hands.

JEFF YOUNGHUSBAND said furiously: "There's been a newspaper in this town long enough. An editor, too."

Dave looked now at Preftake. "I've lived twenty years in this Basin without a newspaper. I let one come in on the condition that it didn't bother me." There was no arrogance in his voice, and Preftake with quiet astonishment saw that he meant it, and that it was the truth.

"That was Barkley, who owned the *Advocate* before me?" he asked quietly.

Big Dave nodded. "He could live here because I let him. You can't. I've never let a whelp with a patent-medicine advertiser dictate to me yet. And I won't now. I'll wreck your shop and keep on wrecking it."

"You aren't the first man that thought he could gag the press, Dave," Preftake said. "You can't now. You haven't yet. You won't."

"And if it hadn't been for that girl of yours, you wouldn't even think you could," Riley said bluntly.

"Riley!" Preftake said sharply.

"Aye," Riley said bitterly. "That's the word of a Younghusband!"

AND in that moment of Riley's galling speech, Preftake felt that it was the truth—it must be the girl who had betrayed them. He saw big Dave's hand brush back the skirt of the coat, and in that second all the weariness in him was washed away by excitement. He leaped for the big man, caught the hand where it was clenched on the walnut gun-butt, and then he knew that big Dave Younghusband was now gone berserk. He held onto the wrist and was whirled off his feet, slammed down on the edge of the press, and a great driving blow in his chest seemed to crush it. He rolled against it close to big Dave's body, and found that he could reach the gun while Dave's arms were wringing the very life out of him. He flipped out the gun in a small arc, heard it hit the press, and then clink and clatter down into the bowels of the machinery.

Then he stiffened his back, brought a knee up, and shoved with all his strength in his thick shoulders, and his back was gouged against the press as he went free of big Dave. He heard the deep thud, the scrape of a boot as Dave was brought up against the wall.

"I have broken a whelp before," big Dave said, coming toward him. Cole lashed out twice swiftly, and heard the tearing thud of bone on gristle and flesh, and he felt the raw grate on his knuckles of Dave's shelving chin. And then the big arms were around him, and he was slogging at a big and hard body. They fell now, and he felt all the solid weight on him as a fist smashed into his face. The wet salt taste of blood welled in his mouth, and the smashing thud of those fists on his face held his thoughts tight by the thread of agony. Then he felt his body free of the weight again, and he sprang to his feet. Dave Younghusband was just rising, his face bloody and dogged and ugly with rage.

And then the shot came, and he felt a sharp slam in his side that threw him back against the press just as the second shot crashed. It was the noise that shuttled his gaze to Jeff, and he saw him clutching his throat with both hands, and gag and retch and finally stagger. There was the feeling that this was seen

through gauze, and he shook his head. Abruptly something took the breath from him, and he opened his eyes and could see the crack in the floor big and wide and full of grease and ink and dust, before the soft curtain of black drifted in from the side of his field of vision—with it a thousand pinwheels of fire that lulled him to unconsciousness. . . .

In the eternity of fever and nightmare that followed, there was only one break. Like a slow and ponderous wave, the pain receded and he found himself staring at a ceiling he did not recognize. Looking around him, he smelled the medicine, saw the lamp burning low on a table. He moved slowly, and something in his side shot a knife of pain into his very bowels.

He thought of what had brought him here, and of the fever that was just dying, and a sudden panic gripped him. What day was it, what night? Had he lain here for days possessed of this fever while the Government sale took place?

He tightened his belly muscles to yell, but the contraction was like a hot wire around his waist. Sweating, cursing, he threw the covers from him and stood up. It was the agony of his side that washed away the vertigo. He held his breath, waiting for it to subside, and it would not. He made five staggering steps toward the door before it opened, and he saw Martha Younghusband there, a look of terror twisting her face. And then he fell, and somebody was sobbing over him before he fainted again.

THE next time he wakened, there were bright shafts of sunlight in the room. He looked around him carefully, but before his head was fully turned, he heard her voice, low, husky, half-choked:

"Oh, thank God, thank God!"

She was on her knees beside him.

He stared at her long, and the sudden recollection of her broken word welled into his consciousness. He looked away and said, "What day is it?"

"Tuesday."

He remembered it was Wednesday night that he had seen her in the shop. He said, "The sale is over, then?"

"Yes."

He did not want to ask the outcome; he already knew. He turned away, and when she spoke, he hardly heard.

"Your men got it, Cole. Don't you want to hear?"

Slowly he turned to her, a wordless question in his eyes.

"It was the shooting that did it, that and the *Advocate* piece. They answered your call by the dozens and they brought their cattle and furniture and money and horses to contribute. There was twice the money needed."

"Did your dad and Jeff bid?"

"Riley killed Jeff. Don't you remember? Dad and Sammons were whipped. They bid, but their bids were forced so high on two of the blocks that they could not bid for the third."

HE smiled briefly at the ceiling—until he thought of that night, and how she had betrayed him. Strangely, he felt no anger. He turned to her and asked curiously: "Why did you betray me? I had a duty to do. Couldn't you see?"

"But, Cole, I didn't tell Dad!" she said quickly, earnestly. "Riley came to me Thursday morning, and he said that if you died, he would kill me himself, law or no law, gentleman or no gentleman, hell-fire or no hell-fire. He cursed me, till I got a chance to tell him."

"Tell him what?"

"That Dad and Jeff stayed in town until late, and that on their way home they saw a light in Michael's place at Roan Creek. They knew his wife was sick, and stopped to see if they could help. Your messenger had already left a paper at Michael's and Dad saw it. That is what brought him back."

He felt a great congestion in his throat, and he turned his face to the wall.

"Do you believe me, Cole?" she asked swiftly.

He only nodded and reached for her hand and there was a long silence before he realized she was crying—her body was shaking with sobs.

Gently, he put his hand on her hair, and at his touch, she looked up.

"Does it matter much whether I believe you, Martha?"

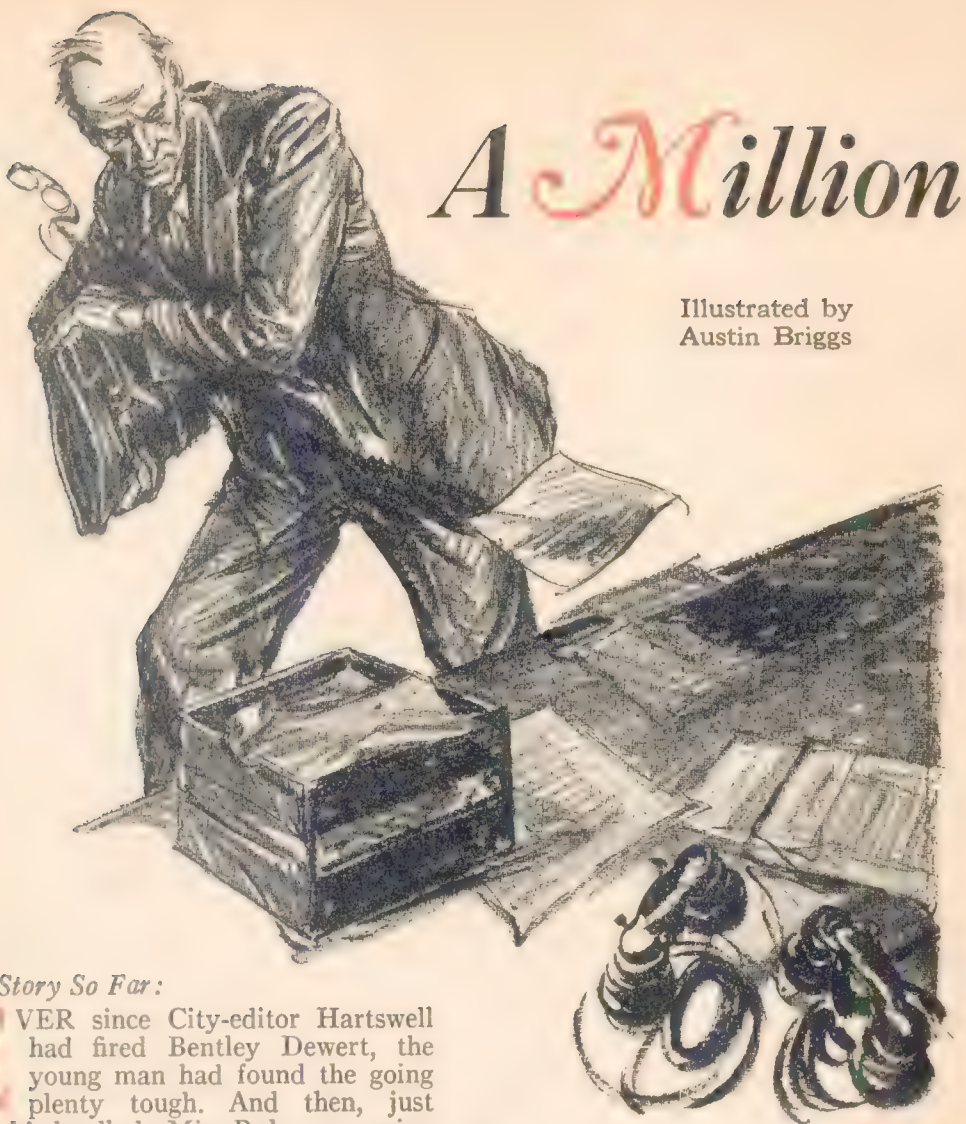
"More than anything in the world," she said huskily.

"Strange," he murmured; "strange that I should greet the only woman I ever wanted to marry by calling and thinking her a liar."

She was still now under his hand, her face averted, and he went on: "Do you suppose it's possible for a man to make up for that by loving a woman all his life the way I love you now—the way I have since I first saw you?"

And now she looked up and she was smiling too.

"I think it is," she said simply.



The Story So Far:

EVER since City-editor Hartswell had fired Bentley Dewert, the young man had found the going plenty tough. And then, just when his landlady Miss Rylan was going to throw him out, he received a letter from Ephraim Brood, president of a well-known soap company, stating that Hartswell had recommended him for a job.

"You," Brood said to him, "are a failure. I'm a success—because I own the secret of success. If you've read 'The Count of Monte Cristo,' you've seen it work. Personal mystery made the sailor *Edmond Dantes* over into the magnificent *Monte Cristo*. Let people *imagine* things about him. Didn't talk about himself. Lawrence of Arabia was another: an able and daring officer, yes; but personal mystery made him a world figure."

"Very interesting, Mr. Brood. But—well, just how does it concern me?"

"Ever hear of a ghost-writer?" Brood demanded. "Well, you're going to be a ghost-actor. I'm going to write a book. Going to give my formula to the world. Need a stooge—somebody to *live* that book. While I write it! That's your

job. Pay you money to be my stooge. You'll make a million dollars. How's that for a job? Want it?"

Dewert took the fantastic job. With the five hundred dollars capital Brood provided, he bought new clothes, put up at the fashionable Washington Towers—and bribed the clerk *not* to let another guest, a French airplane-buyer, know that he, John Destiny (that was the stage name he had chosen) was in residence. The hotel-clerk promptly tipped off the newspaper men—and before the dust settled, a certain airplane-manufacturer had paid Mr. Destiny six thousand dollars to keep away from the airplane-buyer.

Personal Mystery worked even in hard-boiled Wall Street too. As John Destiny, he set up an office near by; and seizing his opportunity, got himself so much talked about as a mysterious new operator (presumably a "front" for well-known and powerful interests), that the all-too-

for *John J. Destiny*

Ephraim Brood believed that "personal mystery" was the secret of success—and he backed young Mr. Destiny to make a million dollars in one year with its aid.

By FULTON T. GRANT



clever and none-too-scrupulous broker Ryster paid him ten thousand dollars for an option on his "holdings" of a certain stock—which in reality amounted to just one hundred shares. It is to be admitted, of course, that our hero had help in this deal from Pyramid Jo Caddis, another tough broker, who hated Ryster.

In another quarter, however, Dewert ran into trouble. One night he was greatly taken by a pretty girl dining with an old gentleman in the Towers restaurant, and was wondering what sort of personal mystery he could employ to make her acquaintance, when the old fellow choked on a fishbone and collapsed. Bentley took them to his rooms and called a doctor. Afterward he politely left them alone—and when he returned, they had vanished, leaving no message.

The newspapers soon supplied the answer: Lorraine Graymaster had aided her wealthy aged uncle to escape from the

asylum in which, she believed, he had been unjustly confined; and the two had disappeared.

They got in touch with Dewert again, however; and he learned that Graymaster's supposed insanity was based on his knowledge of a certain paralyzing light-ray which would be of the utmost value in war. Bentley was able to save Graymaster from a gang of foreign conspirators determined to get possession of the old man's secret, but was himself captured by them. . . . Personal Mystery—and plenty of nerve—worked again, however: Dewert came out of the fracas with a whole skin and a check for fifty thousand dollars; but he knew the excitement had just begun. (*The story continues in detail:*)

"SCRATCH any honest man," cautions a cynical proverb, "and a devil will run out." The intent if not the actual

words of this misanthropic aphorism came home to Bentley with a sense of shock, on the sixtieth day of his ventures under the ægis of Ephraim Brood. The actual moment of realization came, as a matter of fact, in a downtown restaurant—and it caused a flush of red embarrassment to tinge his face. It also caused him to glance furtively about at the other lunchers who might—or so he felt—have been able to read his thoughts. For when a man who for a span of twenty-five years has considered himself as honest as the next fellow, becomes suddenly conscious of having entertained thoughts which, if put into effect, would make him a candidate for public scorn and even prosecution under the law of the land, he is likely to find the disillusionment startling and hard to bear. And Bentley found it all that and more.

"Scratch an honest man—" Bentley had been scratched, and the devil had popped out with a rushing, whistling noise that seemed like a hurricane blowing through the chaos of his mind.

"Gosh!" he muttered under his breath. "I never thought I'd really get so low. Dewert, my boy, there may have been black sheep in your family before, but you're just a common jackal at heart."

And he hurriedly paid his check and dashed out into the fresher air of Nassau Street.

IT had come about subtly. Its beginning went back to that dramatic and tragi-comic moment when he had hastened out of his own hotel room, leaving Messrs. Ross and Stuber helpless despite guns and knives and their evident purpose of eliminating one John J. Destiny from this life—helpless in the knowledge that any move they might make in that direction, while an employee of the hotel stood in the doorway, was likely to land them in the hands of the police. Just how those two mysterious gentlemen were able to explain their presence in his room or to account for the flashing of Bentley's telephone signal, he did not stop to find out. His personal safety, he knew well enough, depended upon his getting away from that place, and doing it fast.

Which is just what he did, barely nodding to the man in hotel uniform who stood questioning at his door.

Fortunately, an elevator was open at his floor; it was no complex matter to walk into it, descend to the street level, then hustle for the subway entrance at a

walking speed which must have caused surprise among other pedestrians.

Once in the subway, he breathed again, and with breath came a sudden, determined plan: With a check for fifty thousand dollars in his pocket, he knew, he was a marked man. "They"—he still referred to Ross and his crowd in that vague pronoun—would never rest until they had not only deprived him of that check,—which (common sense told him) they never intended he should keep anyway,—but probably also had deprived him of the breath of life.

SO the plan, quickly formed, was to stay as far away as possible from places where they would be likely to find him. In his own words to himself:

"This washes me up. If there's anything smart to do right now, it's to get out of circulation—Brood, Personal Mystery and all that notwithstanding. Only I'm going to make sure of that money first."

He did make sure of the money. Since the entrance to the Sphinx National Bank was accessible from the subway entrance, and since "They" could not very well know that he carried an account there, it was safe enough to ride downtown, dart out at the station and deposit his certified check for collection. His next move was to enter the same subway once more and ride uptown to a point as remote from his recent habitat as possible. And right here that instinct which often serves when intelligence is scrambled served Bentley; for he continued his uptown journey until he reached the 181st Street station, where he left the train like an automaton, walked down St. Nicholas Avenue two blocks, and turned toward the river, to find himself complacently entering the boarding establishment of Miss Rylan, with a naturalness which could not have been equaled if he had never, for those seven fantastic weeks, have stepped out of the humdrum life he had known there.

Nor was it until he actually heard the hearty contralto of Miss Rylan herself, exclaiming, "Now hail me St. Patrick, if it aint Mister Dewert hisself in person, and niver changed a mite, neither, the darlint!" that he grew into the full consciousness of what he had done.

All that had been nearly a week ago, now. It had been like a week clipped out of the tissue of his life—of the life of John Destiny, that is. For while Bentley Dewert enjoyed the safety and the

homely comforts of a "star" boarder in an uptown rooming-house (since he alone of all Miss Rylan's brood had actually paid his board in advance), John Destiny was dead. He might, indeed, never have lived at all.

Which was precisely what Bentley desired of that character.

But it had been a restless week—for daily, as he dawdled in bed until ten or later, his conscience troubled him. He was letting old Brood down. He was, in a sense, betraying his inner self. He had allowed things extraneous to his job to come between his job and himself, and there was no decent excuse for him.

He could not, he knew, venture downtown to his Pine Street office. His memory of the man sitting in that window across from him, rifle leveled with grim meaning, was enough warning on that score. It was all right to dismiss Ross and His One-eyed Highness with a shrug and call them "comic opera" and all that; but deep under his scorn for them he knew well enough that whoever they were and whatever they wanted, they were desperate, determined men.

Nor, by the same token, could he venture back to the hotel. Day after day he hated himself for his fears, yet assured himself that hiding away at Miss Rylan's was the only sensible thing he had done in many starts.

"I'd rather sit here and laugh them off," he told himself, "than be brave and let them work on me."

Then, of course, there was the money. Each day that ticked off the calendar was costing John Destiny two thousand six hundred dollars on the red side of his accounts. True, he had managed to get away with that fifty-thousand-dollar check, and he supposed that it had been by now collected by his bank.

"Not," he grumbled inwardly, "that it does me any good here."

BY Monday, the situation was unbearable. His fear of Ross and Stuber and the rest of that crowd dwindled.

"I just can't let another day go by," he decided. "I'll have to take my chances with those birds sooner or later, anyhow. I'll bet the office is the last place they'll be looking for me now."

And so, more in desperation than out of bravery, he took a downtown subway.

It was almost lunch-time. Better stop somewhere and have a bite. After all, if "They" caught up with him, it was

better to have it on a full stomach. Which is how he happened to drift down John Street and through to Nassau, pushing his way through the already thickening crowd at the café.

His mind, however, was not on food. On the contrary, little tabulated lists of figures glittered in his memory. If that check had been cashed, then he must have \$69,730.00 in the bank. Not enough, of course. He ought to have something like \$147,000.00 to be up to schedule.

AND then, as he lifted a plate of beans from the service counter and went through the throng to a little round "stand-up" table, he thought suddenly:

Seventy thousand dollars!

"Now I wonder," he told himself, "what kind of a fool I am!"

Seventy thousand dollars!

"Hell's bells, that's enough to last a lifetime—at six per cent, that's better than four thousand a year. And it's mine, isn't it? I earned it, didn't I? Then what am I waiting for? What am I doing around here? All I'd have to do is to send old Brood his five hundred back, plus a good amount for interest, and I'm free. I could grab a boat and take a nice healthy trip to somewhere. I'd like to see a little of South America. Or maybe Africa. Or Tahiti. Or practically any place where there isn't anybody trying to put the bee on me because they think I know something I don't even know the name of."

The beans, by this time, began to seem a little tawdry, a little beneath the dignity of a man worth seventy thousand dollars. The man standing beside him at his table was frowning as this fellow went on mumbling and muttering away to himself. Drunk, probably. Ought not to allow young loons like that into a working-man's restaurant. . . .

Seventy thousand dollars!

"There's a Cook's office down here somewhere," he found himself thinking. "It wouldn't do any harm to go and see what kind of quick tours they have on tap. Might get a boat out of here this afternoon."

And then, just as he was elevating a forkful of beans, a subtle whisper which we call "conscience," finally made itself heard. True enough, he did have seventy thousand dollars in the bank, but—he—Bentley Dewert—wasn't the kind of man to run out with it!

"Scratch an honest man, and the devil runs out."

"Just a jackal," he muttered, paying his check. "What a thing to find out about yourself!" He was out in the street now. "That old fool trusted me. It isn't the money, after all, it's the principle. The Personal Mystery game. If I should walk out with that coin, I'd be a so-and-so. Maybe John Destiny's that kind of a crook, but not Bentley Dewert. That would be like stealing candy from a two-year-old. No sir, we'll just pretend we never thought of that one."

FROM the street corner he could see the window across from his own. It was dark, empty. A large "To Let" sign had been stuck over the window-glass.

"Well, there isn't much danger from that angle, anyhow," he mused. "Besides, there's a cop on the corner, and I can barricade the door, once I get in, so they can't just come in with their damned key."

His downstairs "shingle" all new and gilded, read facetiously, "*John J. Destiny, P.M.*," but he had no smile for it. The elevator man was the usual one, and he nodded and smiled at Bentley.

"Been away, have yuh? Good business? They say things is pickin' up, Mister. Wisht I could get out on the road or somethin'. There aint no future in playin' nurse to one o' these here shake-buggies."

But if there was a faint tingle of warmth in Bentley's heart as he stepped across the threshold of his office door, a faint ray of expectancy, a timid feeling that something *must* have happened during his week of absence, it was doomed to die quickly.

Save for a light coat of dust over his scanty furniture there was nothing new in his office. There was, indeed, no evidence that Ross or any of his crowd had been there. They would have left prints in the floor-dust, at least. But the utter silence, the utter emptiness of his place was unbroken, dull, permanent. It chilled him.

"I might have known it," he grumbled to himself. "Brood gave me a wrong steer when he told me to take offices. Personal Mystery's all right—only you have to give it a little boost, now and then."

He slid into his seat at his desk (though not before carefully moving it out of range of the opposite window, just in case) full of despond, full of chagrin, his heart heavy and his hopes for Brood's millions growing distant by the second.

He must have sunk into a reverie of bitter contemplation; for when the sound came to him, darkness had fallen. The faint greenish-blue of the street lights outside penetrating the gloom of early evening, cast weird shadows across his office. But there *had* been a sound—he was sure of that. And immediately all the menace of those mysterious foreign agents, their cold-blooded suavity and their incredible ability to act and operate right in the open where sheer numbers should make for individual safety, swept over him like a thick shadow of terror.

Then he heard it clearly again.

It was a human sound, undeniably. It was a knocking, a timid rapping, on his office door. Then a weak voice called: "Hello, hello. . . . I say, hello."

Bentley snapped on the lights, reasoning sagely that whoever it was could hardly be on a hostile visit. Certainly "They," or any of Ross' crowd, wouldn't stop at merely rapping on his door and calling "Hello!"

"I'm coming," he called through.

He hurried across the room, paused an instant in the little anteroom to listen at the door, heard nothing alarming, then snapped the lock and flung the door wide.

Then he said, open-mouthed: "Oh."

For nothing in the world could look less like the unknowing key to Brood's promised million than this diminutive, frail, meek *Milquetoast* of a man who stood there, clutching a black bag under his arm and peering up at Bentley like a weebegone bird-dog who has missed his flush and is shamefully aware of it. He held his hat in his hand, and his entirely bald little dome gleamed in the hall lamplight. He nervously fumbled with his spectacles as though to give courage to his eyes as he said:

"I—I—beg your pardon, but—I mean, are you the Promotion Manager, sir?"

"The what?" asked Bentley.

"The Promotion Manager—the P.M., you know."

"Oh," said Bentley doubtfully. He had forgotten, at the moment, his facetious door-sign. "Why, yes, I guess so," he finished. "Better step inside."

PROMOTION MANAGER! Now there was an interpretation! Personal Mystery, if you like, but ironical coming from such a queer little man.

Old-maidish, he was. He hugged his heavy black case preciously and lovingly, and hesitated just an instant, then came pattering through the door and stood in



the middle of the office as though suddenly undecided why he had come and half tempted to run away again.

"Have a chair," suggested Bentley. The little visitor seemed to need prompting. A lean, pointed nose with spectacles astride, accentuated the bird-dog idea. A rather seedy though neat gray suit showed through a threadbare overcoat and a muffler that all but choked him. Rubbers, and umbrella too, completed the picture; and when he began to talk, sitting on the edge of Bentley's solitary visitor's chair as though half afraid he was intruding, he was half ludicrous, half pathetic.

"Oh, dear," he sighed. "Oh, dear me! I do hope I'm doing the right thing. It's so very hard to know, isn't it?"

"I guess it is," said Bentley. It was merely a murmur. He was not interested in this little man. Not the type. And the disappointment in him was stealing his attention. So this was Brood's promised Personal Mystery client, was it? So this was the kind that "always walk in, sooner or later!"

"You see," the visitor was saying, "I'm much too impetuous—it's my great weakness."

If there was any weakness that was *not* likely to be shared by this fellow, thought Bentley, it would be impetuosity. He gave an inward smile.

"Suppose," he said brusquely and with an air of being businesslike, "we get down to business, sir. Did you mention your name?"

"It's Jaffley," said his visitor. "Homer Lucretius Jaffley."

It *would* be something like that, Bentley thought, but he said:

"I don't seem to recall having heard it anywhere, sir, but if—"

"But you will," interjected Jaffley. "Everybody will."

"Indeed?"

"That's why I'm here, you see—I've had enough of lawyers—"

"Really?"

"I've been stupid up to now. What I need is a promotion manager. Lawyers are much too cautious. Of course Mr. Tolliston's being upstairs made it possible for me to notice your sign, and so I knocked."

"Tolliston? Ought I to know him?"

"Why—he's a lawyer. He has an office upstairs in this building, you see."

"I see," agreed Bentley untruthfully, "But suppose you tell me just what is your business with me, Mr. Jaffley."

Jaffley said, sententiously:

"You're a promoter. I want you to promote me. I want you to make me the most famous man in America."

"OH," said Bentley, but it was actually a gasping sound. He added, ironically: "Is that all?"

Jaffley caught the irony.

"Not just me, of course," he said with a quick, bland little smile. "But I will be famous when you give my vaporifex to the world."

Bentley gasped again. "Your what?" he demanded.

"Vaporifex. I invented it."

"Oh, so you're an inventor?"

"I'm an engineer. I'm a graduate of a well-accredited school. Here—I can show you my diploma." He reached as if toward an inner pocket, but Bentley held up his hand.

"Not at all necessary, Mr. Jaffley," he assured the man, "One can see at a glance that you're a truthful man. Now just what is your vaporifex—whatever it is?"

"I call it vaporifex. Probably that isn't a good name for it, but it is descriptive. You see, it's a steam-generator."

"Steam? A boiler of some kind?"

Jaffley was shocked and injured. "Indeed it is not," he squeaked indignantly. "It will do away with boilers. It generates steam without a boiler—pure water-vapor, at a rate of efficiency and production-cost that nothing equals today. It will revolutionize industry. It will banish coal and oil fuel; it will—"

Bentley was indulgent. "Say, that's a big order, isn't it? Just what does it burn?"

"Electricity, of course."

Bentley pounced on that.

"Not that I'm an engineer," he said, "But everybody knows that electricity is produced by the expenditure of some kind of energy, usually coal or some fuel, unless you can plan on having water-power everywhere; and that seems—"

"That's just it," piped Jaffley. "It burns less electricity. Practically none—about as much as a one-hundred-watt lamp to produce dry steam equal to what a ton of coal will do with a superheater."

"Well, you ought not to have trouble selling it. Why come to me?"

"I will not sell it!" It was not only an exclamation; it was a challenge. "They've tried to do me out of it. They've tried to get me to sell my rights. They've offered me twenty thousand dollars for the clear patent. The robbers! The crooks! I'll sell it for not one penny less than a million. I—"

"But what do you want, then? A million dollars is a lot of money." Bentley ruefully remembered how true he had begun to find that statement.

"I want to put it into industry. My vaporifex is as great as Watts' steam engine or Fulton's steamboat. The world will remember Homer Jaffley and his vaporifex. It will be in the schoolbooks. I deserve it. It's my right to have it. I've suffered, I've starved, and I've—"

That, of course, gave the little man away. Bentley repressed a smile as he said coolly:

"But I understand you've seen lawyers already. Why weren't they interested?"

JAFFLEY was suddenly hard and bitter. "Fools!" he spat. "Stupid, over-cautious fools! Lawyers, pah! I've seen dozens of them." Then he calmed for a moment.

"Let me show you something," he said, and began unfastening his bag, pulling sheaves of papers, blueprints and photographs from it, spreading them over Bentley's desk. Bentley sighed. He had thought he was just on the point of getting rid of this poor little megalomaniac, but now—well, no use in hurting him.

Jaffley held up a photograph of a strange-looking assembly of what seemed to be flat square plates, piled one atop the other and connected by a rod or tube through the centers. Small tubes

squirmed fantastically around this core; and electric wires, gauges and vaguely familiar apparatus bristled from it.

"There it is," squeaked Jaffley. "That's my first working model. I made every part of it with my own hands. It's only two feet six inches high, and covers an area of less than two square feet; but it will produce three hundred fifty pounds of steam in eighty seconds at a cost of about a tenth of a cent. Vaporifex, see? From the Latin, *that which makes vapor*." Bentley frowned at the repetition of the obvious, but said nothing. Jaffley handed him a letter.

"Read that!" he said. "That's the sort of treatment I get. And yet this little machine, crude as it is, would heat an apartment-house. It would run a small machine-shop. It would do steam cooking for a big restaurant. It—"

BUT Bentley stopped him there. No use letting him go on. . . . Give 'em an inch, and they'll talk you blind! Crackpots, nuts. Besides, he wasn't a promoter. If he did any promoting, it would be for John J. Destiny's million.

"Wait a minute, Mr. Jaffley," he said, holding up his hand. "That sounds very fine and interesting, the way you say it; but let's be practical for a minute. You say you've seen a lot of lawyers, and I gather they didn't want to take you on. Doesn't that suggest there's something just a little—ah—something not quite ready for industry about your—"

"Stop!"

Jaffley recoiled as though his face had been slapped. He jumped from his chair like a jack-in-the-box.

"Stop right there! I don't want to hear that. I've heard enough of that. I've been humiliated enough. I've been laughed at and eased out and swindled and pushed around by half the lawyers in New York already. Kept dangling while they tried to find a flaw in my patent and cheat me out of it. Or else they tell me it isn't practical! I knocked on your door because you're a promotion man, and I thought you'd have some vision. Lawyers are too cautious. But right now I can see you're just as bad. I don't want you to say one more word. You've had your chance, and you've muffed it. I was a fool to come here anyhow. But one day you'll remember this, and you'll regret it, too. You'll remember Homer Jaffley, and you'll have a red face. Good evening, sir. I'm sorry to have troubled you."

And while Bentley gaped in surprise, the furious little man snatched up the papers he had only just spread over the desk, crammed them into his bag and seized his hat.

At the door he stopped, and wheeled to give a parting thrust at Bentley.

"You'll remember this," he fairly squeaked. "Your grandchildren will see my name in their schoolbooks: Homer Jaffley, inventor of the vaporifex—and they'll laugh at you. Everybody'll laugh at you—all of you. Laugh at you fools—you fools—fools!"

The closing door cut off his last epithet, but Bentley could hear him muttering in the hall until the elevator came.

"Well," Bentley said aloud when he had recovered from the shock of his surprise, "maybe I said the wrong thing."

He gave a short laugh: "Fancy Mrs. Dewert's little boy promoting a steam cooker!"

And then he realized that he still held in his hand the letter the inventor had told him to read—and which, overborne by the little man's garrulity and subsequent fury, he had not even glanced at.

"Poor devil," he murmured. "Went off in such a huff he forgot to take it along."

He read it with inattention. It was brief and terse and began in the time-honored manner. "Dear Sir," it read: "We are sincere in our regret that our clients have decided to discontinue negotiation with—"

And then the telephone rang.

Even before he had actually placed the receiver at his ear, he knew who was bellowing at the other end of the wire. There could be no doubt about it. The instrument vibrated like a wounded thing under the impact of angry sound.

And Bentley, quaking inside, did not call, "Hello." Instead he said, in a tone as matter-of-fact as he could muster:

"Yes, Mr. Brood."

"Don't you *Mister Brood* me, you blinkety blankety blank," roared the voice. "You get right over here this minute, you hear? Where in thunder you been? . . . Shut up! Who asked you to talk? Shut up and get going. I'll give you ten minutes."

And thus Jaffley's letter went absent-mindedly into Bentley's pocket, unread.

EPHRAIM BROOD was behaving like Ephraim Brood. Small consolation, perhaps, but the almighty explosiveness of the fat little Napoleon of soap touched

up Bentley's sense of humor, which had been dwindling these weeks of inactivity; and even when the roar and thunder of Brood's outpouring anathema ought to have shriveled him with shame and humiliation, he found himself able only with great effort to suppress something like a chuckle.

"Yah, yah, yah, yah, there you are, you yah, yah, yah—"

Or something equally incoherent.

Epithets became mere sounds; syllables lost themselves in transit from the angry Brood's lungs to Bentley's reddening ears. Thrice Bentley had attempted to reply, to offer some feeble explanation for his continued absence and silence; but the crimson tide of Brood's uncontrollable rage had swamped him. The gushing roar bade fair to become permanent. Brood's ponderous chin quivered like jelly. His pink face grew red, then purple, and was showing signs of becoming thundercloud black, until Bentley, knowing the little giant's paroxysms from rueful experience, began to fear for his welfare. Apoplexy, indeed, seemed just around the corner. Then suddenly it stopped. Brood's mouth closed. He leaned his weight heavily against a magazine table and hung there, dangling, so to speak, breathing heavily.

Then he said, with abnormal calm: "And that's what I think of you, boy. What have you to say? Answer me that."

THIS brought reality out of the fantastic; and it also disconcerted Bentley far worse than Brood's unreal yelling. But he managed to say:

"I hadn't run away, Mr. Brood. And if I didn't come to you before, it was because I was—well, I didn't want to drag you into something—dangerous; and I didn't know how to explain it. Maybe I was embarrassed, sir."

"Talk fast, boy," said Brood. Bentley talked fast and to purpose. He plunged into it. It was an outpouring of a soul and of a trammelled conscience. He told of Buntsman Graymaster and his incredible disguises. He told of the equally incredible attempts on the old man's life, of the incident on Thirty-seventh Street where an unworldly light had all but blinded him as he tried to help the old man. And he told of the purely novellesque sequel to that incident, his encounter with Ross, his trip to some mansion outside of New York and the group of foreigners with His One-eyed Highness in their command. He told of their re-



On the bed was Jaffley—and he looked very dead. Bentley was already

turn to New York and the fifty-thousand-dollar check which was given him as a blind, but which he had managed to retain nevertheless. And he told of his fears for his own life and liberty which prompted him to disappear from hotel and office. He told these things well and with intense sincerity. But when he had finished—up to the point of his return to Pine Street—and paused to hear Brood's comment, the old man merely said:

"Hurrumph! Better stop reading mystery-stories, boy. What else?"

Which was ice-water in Bentley's soul.

But he did finish it. If this was to be the end, let it end honestly. Let Brood know the facts and take them for what they were. Let him know the hopelessness, the disappointment, the slowly fading belief in Personal Mystery, the ridiculousness of that poor deluded Jaffley popping into his office, wanting him to promote a steam cooker or something. Let him see, after all, the fallibility of his own theory. Let him understand.

He had said his say. He had told his tale. Of course, Brood wouldn't believe it. Nobody would. Brood would tear up the contract; and he, Bentley, would go back to Miss Rylan's and begin all over again—at something sane and tedious and unexciting, like a job peddling typewriter ribbons. All over, of course, all but the shouting. Trust Brood for the shouting. He could do plenty of that. Could and would.

But Brood was merely *looking* at him.

Those little gray eyes seemed to be crawling, antlike, over Bentley's face. Couldn't the little old crackpot *say* something? Why didn't he yell and swear and curse and get it over with?

BUT Brood did nothing of the kind. He looked. Just looked; and presently he said in a disconcertingly quiet voice:

"Quite a story, boy. Quite a story."

Bentley had no answer ready.

"So you got yourself a good scare, did you?" Brood asked, just as quietly.



reeling when the garage man came . . . and windows were opened.

"I guess you could call it that," Bentley said.

"And you've still got that money?"

"I've only got seventy thousand dollars—sixty-seven thousand, to be exact, sir. So I'm nearly eighty thousand short of schedule. I guess I'm not cut out for your job. I—"

Then, inconceivably, Brood laughed. He laughed a short, apish little laugh. Then he chuckled, with an inward mirth, that sent ripples of merriment playing over his fat little body.

"Ho-ho, ho-ho, oh, my soul!" he laughed. "Ha-ha-ha, hi-hi-hi, ho-ho-ho! So you're not cut out for it, hey? Oh, bless my soul, bless my poor soul, ha-ha-ha!"

And Bentley found himself reddening with an anger which Brood's recent outbursts of accusations had failed to produce in him.

"I don't," he said, "think it's so damned funny."

"Ho-ho-ho! He doesn't think it's funny!" And he went into another spasm.

Bentley reached for his checkbook, and ignoring the little man, began writing out a check.

"Here," he said, "Here's your money. Take it. All of it. I don't want a penny. Take this check and give me back my contract." He shoved it into Brood's hand and reached for his hat. But Brood's fingers crumpled the check, then tore it, as the laughter slowly faded from his eyes.

"Don't," he said, "be a damned nincompoop, boy!"

IT was the wrong thing to say. Bentley restrained himself only with great effort from throwing an inkwell.

"Don't be a fool, boy," said Brood, wiping tears of laughter from his eyes. "Sit down, and listen to me."

Bentley sat, albeit he could not tell why.

"Listen, boy," said Ephraim Brood, now under control. "This is the best news I've had in all my life. Don't go and spoil it now. Don't go and get mad.

I wasn't laughing at you; I was laughing at me."

"Why?" Bentley was skeptical.

"Because—oh, my soul! Because the joke is on me, boy. Because, after years of trusting nobody, of not even letting my right hand extend credit to my left hand, boy, I suddenly discover an honest man."

"Huh? I don't see—"

"That's just it, you don't see—oh, my soul!" And Brood nearly went off again into another gust of laughter. But suddenly he sobered.

"Let me tell you, boy. This is it. Now listen—" And Bentley, considerably embarrassed and confused, found listening easier than talking.

"Don't you see what you've done?" Brood demanded rhetorically. "You've *proved* Personal Mystery; that's what."

BENTLEY opened his mouth, but no words came.

"You've *proved* it completely. Those foreigners—whoever they are—they were afraid of you. Why? Because you didn't tell 'em anything. They went to a lot of trouble, didn't they, to keep you out of something? They tried to bribe you with a fifty-thousand-dollar check, didn't they?"

"They never intended me to cash it. I think they had ideas about my not going back into circulation again," Bentley managed to say.

"That's just it!" Brood pounced on that. "Making you out bigger'n you are. People always afraid of people when they don't know about 'em. Got you money, didn't it? Big money, too. Don't have to be ashamed of that money."

"But it's not enough. I'm slipping behind every day. I'll never catch up at this rate. And nobody comes into that office at all. *That* part of it is a flop."

"Flop? D'ye think they're going to walk in and lay a check in your hand, boy? D'ye think you don't have to do something? D'ye think they'll come in *every* day? Why, listen to me, boy, if a man comes into your life once a month that's worth money to you, it's a miracle, that's what. And what about that feller with the steam engine—answer me that?"

"It isn't a steam engine. He calls it a vaporifex. It's just a gadget to produce steam. He claims all kinds of impossible things for it. He's just a nut."

"How d'you know? You aint an engineer, boy. How d'you know it's just a gadget?"

"Because he's been around to all the law offices in the city, and nobody seems to want anything to do with it."

"What's that prove? Ever hear about Robert Fulton? Ever read your history-book? 'Fulton's Folly,' they called his steamboat. Called him a madman, too. Even pretended he was a sorcerer in the pay of the devil, defying laws of God. Made plenty scandal. Tried to restrain him. You aren't really dumb, boy; why don't you start using your head?"

"I don't think I like—"

"Who cares what you think? How do you know why those lawyers turned Jaffley down? Lawyers don't know it all, anyhow."

"Well, for one thing, he left a letter on my desk which will show you about what people think of his gadget. I've even got it in my pocket. I was going to mail it back to the poor fool; then you phoned."

"Let me see it."

Bentley produced the letter. Brood snatched it, roughly adjusted his *pince-nez* and began to read. Then he said:

"Hurrumph! You read this?"

"I started to."

"Bah! Read it, then."

Bentley took the letter.

Dear Sir:

We are sincere in our regret that our clients have decided to discontinue negotiation with you in the matter of your invention, basing their decision upon your continued refusal to consider their offer of outright purchase at a figure deemed generous.

It is our duty, furthermore, to caution you that, in the opinion of our consultant engineers, any attempt of yours to introduce such a device into industry would not only meet with failure but could involve you in dangers which your ignorance seems to persist in ignoring.

Tolliston, Loewe & Schuster, Attys.

(Signed) Benjamin Tolliston.

H. L. Jaffley, Esq.
909 West Tenth Street
New York City, N. Y.

He read it again, too. There seemed nothing about such a letter which did not prove that these lawyers had not made an honest study of his invention, even to the point of bringing it to the attention of some industrial client. They were cautioning him for his own good against proceeding with a thing predestined to failure. And they had gone so far, apparently, as to consult expert opinion.

"It seems to prove my point, sir," Bentley said. "And besides, I'm not a promoter. That was just a mistake on the little fool's part. What would I do with it, even if it were good?"

"How do you know you're not a promoter? Any man with capital is a potential promoter. Besides, he said you were, didn't he? He thinks you are, doesn't he? That's Personal Mystery for you. What more do you want? And listen, boy, did you notice that warning? Why would they warn this inventor if they weren't afraid of him? They tried to buy his invention, didn't they? Didn't want him to manufacture, that's what. And why didn't they?"

"I wouldn't know."

"Then go find out, boy. That's what I'm hiring you for."

Bentley stared at him. "You mean you think I ought to go after it?"

"Do you want him to drop it in your lap? What are you hanging around here for? Wasting my time, that's what! Get out of here, boy. Go on. No, shut up and get started. You've got nothing to say that I want to hear. You've got a job to do. Go to it!"

And the little fat man fairly bounced up and pushed Bentley toward the door. On the threshold, however, he modified his brusqueness for an instant. He laid his hand in a kindly, almost fatherly manner on Bentley's shoulder, saying:

"You're a fine lad, Dewert. A good, clean lad. I've got a lot more confidence in human nature today than I ever had before—seventy thousand dollars' worth more."

"I—I don't believe I understand, sir—" Bentley began with true frankness, but Brood snapped at him:

"Hurrumph! You wouldn't. Get out of here, now. What are you waiting for? Want me to kiss you?"

And Bentley went out of the door. You can't talk with a man like Brood.

TENTH STREET, when you have walked from Fifth Avenue to Ninth Avenue, begins to seem endless. When you approach the river, and the dwelling-houses yield to stables, lofts and nondescript buildings to house nondescript commerces, you can scarcely believe that human beings actually make their home in those dingy, odorous, entirely unhome-like places. You begin to suspect that the address you have in your pocket is only a gag, a blind, perhaps. A horse or a ten-ton truck might find a com-

fortable habitat over there, but you resent the implication. You don't pay visits to a horse.

Such was Bentley's frame of mind as he walked, that chill, wintry morning, across Eleventh Avenue, where the city appears to dip its bitter end into the river, and where warehouses, piers and garages crowd out the apartment-buildings which have lined the streets for the last two miles.

"If Jaffley lives at 909," he decided, "he must live in a machine-shop or a stable." Which was not, it became soon apparent, far from the truth.

FOR Homer Lucretius Jaffley lived—if living it be called—at 909. The building itself was no dwelling-house at all. It was, among other things, a garage, over which was a series of lofts. To enter it, you walked through the garage, dodged a paint-sprayer, and avoided a steam-jet, ducked under a misplaced beam to reach a stairway, and stumbled up in utter darkness, until some instinct suggested that there was a door in the murk before you, and that behind that door might be Jaffley.

"Jaffley? Oh, yeah, sure. That's the perfessor," said a grimy garage hand when Bentley questioned him. "Stick yer head up the stairs and yell."

Bentley did that, with no result at all. Then he climbed the baffling stairs, fumbled for a door, struck his head sharply on it before seeing it, cursed, and began knocking.

No answer.

He knocked again, called again.

Still no answer. A faint odor of illuminating gas lingered in the dark hall, but that was the only suggestion that any human might inhabit the loft. Frustrated and puzzled, for it was still early morning and Jaffley should certainly be at home, he went downstairs gingerly and asked the garage man if he had seen the little inventor go out.

"Nah! He aint up yet. I been woik-in' right here, an' he'd hafta practically step on me to git out," was the reply. "Besides, there's been a feller from the electric company here to shut off his service. Guess he aint payin' so well."

So Bentley went back again.

Knocking and shouting was of no avail. Rattling the padlock which hung in its staple, ready to fasten the door when the occupant was away, served no better. But a push, done with a viciousness born of disappointment, suddenly flung the



"Get out of here—
you've got nothing to
say that I want to
hear! What are you
hanging around for—
want me to kiss you?"

door open; and Bentley stumbled into a barren, frigid, unwholesome garret—and was almost asphyxiated by gas.

Because there *was* gas. In that dark, gloomy, unfurnished unlivable loft where poor Jaffley made his home, there was gas and almost nothing else. The air was thick with it. It pressed against Bentley's lungs and brought sick tears into his eyes and a metallic taste in his mouth when he opened it to shout.

"Hey!" he yelled. "Hey, down there—help!"

And then, staggering on inside, he saw that at the end of the loft was an army cot, a gas-plate with a single burner, clothes hanging from hooks, a drawing-board perched on a box to form a table—and a vast amount of odds and ends scattered over the floor. But on the bed was Jaffley—and he looked very dead.

Bentley was already reeling and sick when the garage man came. In the vagueness of his mind he was aware that windows were opened, that more people had arrived, that he himself was being violently pushed or dragged or in some rough way motivated, out of the place into fresher air, and that two men carrying the limp body of Jaffley passed him in the dim twilight of the loft.

But it was not until he found himself, somehow, in a seat in the business office of the garage with a white-clad interne slapping his face and shaking him, that he learned just what had happened.

"Lucky we've got an oxygen tank," the

interne was saying. "Got one chance out of five to pull him through. But it was pretty close. Friend of yours, Mister?"

Bentley answered almost mechanically.

"Not exactly a friend—sort of kind of, though."

"Why would he want to commit suicide?"

"I wouldn't know," said Bentley, his head clearing suddenly. "Maybe he was disappointed in love."

THE Harlan Memorial Hospital is not far from Tenth Street. The garage man, awestricken and rather silent, in the face of near-death, was willing to risk his job by driving Bentley there in the wake of the ambulance. But it required two hours of waiting before he was admitted to the still, little white room where they had taken Jaffley.

The frail hands lay limp on the white bedding. The drawn hungry face turned toward Bentley as he stepped near.

"Go 'way," said the parched lips, weakly. "Go 'way—you mustn't come here and laugh at me." Then suddenly, a wild look came into his eyes and he jerked himself up to a half sitting position, stabbing his finger at his visitor and almost screaming:

"Get out! Let me alone! Why don't you let—me—alone?"

Bentley laid his hand on the bony shoulder.

"I'm not here to laugh at you, Mr. Jaffley. I came to tell you that we're going to put over your vap—vaporifex, you

and I. That's why I came to your place—and found you. Now hurry up and get well. You've got work to do."

It was as though an electric bulb had been switched on in the man's soul.

"You mean—you believe—" He almost whispered it.

"Sure I do. I thought it over, and I think you've got something. Now you get well, and we'll start things going. That is—if you'll take me on as your promotion manager."

"But—but I haven't any money. I need capital. I—oh, don't you see, it's no use."

"I have capital," Bentley told him. "And I've got a corporation. Come back to my office when you get out of here—tomorrow—and we'll figure things out."

The white hand reached for Bentley's.

Bentley took it, and left. He didn't like such scenes.

"PYRAMID" Jo Caddis sat across his desk, industriously toying with his watch-charm and not giving Bentley the benefit of visible attention; but he was not missing a word. Presently he said:

"Son, get this straight: I betcha in twenty years of fooling around Wall Street, financing this and that, I've had a thousand crazy inventors wanting me to float something, see? And I never bit yet. No sir—not Jo Caddis. But listen, now: First, I think you're a smart guy. I got reason, aint I? I think you're plenty smart. And second, I think maybe there's somethin' in this gadget you say this goof has got, that you aint figured on."

"Well?"

"Lemme see that letter from the lawyer."

Bentley produced the letter. Caddis read it once, and again; then he nodded.

"You know who Tolliston is?"

"No."

"He's the big-shot lawyer for New World Fuels. And what's that tell us?"

"I wouldn't know."

"Betcha it was New World that he talked about this steam boiler to."

"It's not a boiler."

"I know, I know; but I can't pronounce it. Anyhow, I betcha it was New World that offered the little inventor cash, then turned him down when he wouldn't take it. An' what's that mean?"

"You seem to know all the answers, Mr. Caddis."

Caddis nodded. "I been around," he said. "I'd say it means that New World

don't *want* your friend's gadget to get out. They offered him something to get rid of it."

"I don't follow you."

"Listen! I aint no engineer, see? But if I was in the fuel business, and a feller comes along with a gadget that might cut fuel costs in half, I'd be willing to pay him to get rid of him, see?"

"Then you mean they didn't want—"

"Sure I mean that. It's only a guess, see; but it's a good guess. A smart guess. Companies is like that. Big companies, see? They go whole hog or none. They don't want competition. If somebody invents something better than they got, they either buy it—and develop it—or else—"

"Or else what?"

Jo Caddis shrugged. "Ever hear tell of a guy who invented a radio that didn't have tubes?"

"Crystal, sure; everybody knows that."

"No, not crystal, either. Feller invented what he called a—a—I forget the exact name, but it was a gadget that'd cost about five dollars to manufacture. And they say it beat all your ten-, fifteen- and even thirty-tube sets that sell for hundreds of dollars. But what happened? I'll tell you, son. Some smart engineers, working for a big radio combine, paid him three hundred thousand dollars for his patent—and buried it."

"The hell," said Bentley, "you say!"

"Yeah, and that aint all. Lots and lots of inventions are bought up and never developed. There's talk in Congress now of changing the patent laws on that account. Of course, there's two sides to the argument—specially on account of all this unemployment: Some inventions start new industries and make work for lots of people, and some other inventions give the work over to machines so a lot o' guys lose their jobs. Only God could sort out which are good inventions and which are bad ones. . . . But we're dealing with a special case."

BENTLEY pondered over that as Caddis' sharp eyes watched his.

"I gather you mean that sometimes industry sort of gangs on a new invention that might be too—too advanced."

"Well, you can put it like that."

"And you think—"

Caddis shook his head. "Me, I don't think. I can hire guys to think for me. But I gotta hunch that your screwy pal, Jaffley, is due for trouble if he keeps on with his atomizer."

"Vaporifex."

"All right, you pronounce it. I'll help you finance it."

Bentley sat up straight.

"You mean that? You'll help us?"

It was amazing. He had come to Caddis because Caddis was a real promoter, and because, after his (Bentley's) flurry in Wall Street, he had come to like the tough little man. But he had not dared to hope that Pyramid Jo would lend himself to the fantastic adventure which he, Bentley, had decided to undertake.

"Yeah," said Jo. "I'll be the sucker."

"But—but why? You just said, or implied, that the whole fuel industry would be against us, and—"

"Well," said Jo Caddis, "things is getting tame, and I need a good fight. And maybe I got a ax to grind personal. I don't tell all I know, son."

"Gosh!" It was an inadequate comment, but the best Bentley could muster. Jo Caddis smiled, opened a little cabinet and pulled out a bottle.

"A little drink on this wouldn't do any harm, son," he said, and began filling a glass.

Their glasses touched. Caddis winked deeply and said with a grin:

"Here's to the vice president in charge of promotion of Vaporizer, Incorporated. Long may he—"

"Vaporifex," prompted Bentley; "it's—"

"Well," said Caddis, "you oughter know. You're the vice president."

THINGS happen fast when once they start; or so it seemed to Bentley. Only two weeks, since, half out of pity for Jaffley and half out of zeal stimulated by Brood's outburst, he had decided to undertake the seemingly hopeless task of promoting a mere gadget, a gag, an invention which could hardly be even plausible—had, on an inspiration, thrown himself upon Jo Caddis, with no idea of getting more than meager advice from that hard-boiled citizen.

Only two weeks ago—and now look what had happened!

Credit Caddis for most of it; the man might have shady spots in his career, but he knew how to organize. A vast loft down in Spring Street where rents are cheap, called itself a "factory." Bentley's Pine Street offices were filled with two stenographers, a bookkeeper and a young man called Callidor, who was written down on the pay-roll as "assistant to the vice president." The very door-sign of Bentley's facetious flight

had been replaced by a more dignified and less ambiguous placard reading, "VAPORIFEX, INC." And after transactions of dubious clarity but of great rapidity had been effected by Mr. Caddis, Bentley found himself gasping in the sensation of being the possessor of one thousand shares of something called "capital voting stock" in the new company, the title of "vice president" on his personal office-stationery and his private door—and poorer by some fifty thousand dollars which Pyramid Jo's silken if ungrammatical tongue had pried loose from his bank-account.

NOR was this all: Homer Lucretius Jaffley, president of Vaporifex, had been installed in a large glass-enclosed room at the factory. Gadgets and gimmicks and the paraphernalia of tinkering had been furnished him out of Bentley's fifty thousand dollars. Mr. Jaffley had been urged—nay, commanded—to furnish himself with a new suit. And that worthy little genius had been duly—or unduly—shoved into his laboratory—to be, as Pyramid Jo phrased it:

"Safe out of the way, where he can't do no harm."

As to Jo Caddis himself, he put in a daily appearance at "the office," but beyond making himself secretary of the new corporation (on the charter), he did nothing that Bentley or anyone else could verify.

Nor, for that matter, did anyone else.

For Vaporifex, Inc., despite its name and pretensions, remained nothing more than a great myth. And this troubled Bentley deeply.

"When," he demanded of Jo Caddis, one day, "are we going to start building those machines and get into industry?"

Caddis gave him a wry grin.

"Who the devil said we were ever?" countered Jo.

Bentley demanded an explanation. He had never quite trusted Pyramid Jo, and this was almost a confirmation of his worst fears.

"Me," said the promoter expansively, chewing a cigar, "I'm a stock pusher, not an engineer. Anybody can be an engineer. They come a nickel a bag. What would I wanna go into the manufacturing business for, hey?"

"But—"

"Listen, son: Jo Caddis knows his business. *His* business, savvy? And whadda you care, hey? Aint you a V.P.? You gotta job, aint you? You got easy

money, aint you? You gotta salary, aint you? And you don't gotta work, do you? Whaddya think I put Jack Callidor in that office for, hey? He does all the work there is, if any. . . . Whaddya want, love and kisses?"

"Sure," said Bentley, "I draw a salary—out of my own money. But listen, Caddis: I'm not a fool. I trusted you, and what have we got? A factory that doesn't manufacture, full of machines that don't run—and nobody to run 'em. And who paid for them? I did."

"Not you—the company. You aint—"

"My capital, then. I want—"

"Who cares what you want? Whaddya know about building an atomizer?"

"Vaporifex. See, you don't even know the name of it. I thought you believed in it, Caddis. Though you wanted to upset industry with it. So I let you—"

Caddis blew smoke. "Sure, I know. And you think I'm crooked, hey? Keep your shirt on, son."

"I don't mean that," Bentley protested, but inwardly knew he *did* mean that.

"No? That's nice."

"But how can we sell machines to an industry when we don't even pretend to make the machines? You've got poor Jaffley thinking he's somebody, because you put him in a laboratory and let him play; but you can't fool me. I—"

"Hold everything, son," said Jo calmly. "My business is putting over a company. That's what I'm doing. Who said anything about actually making those vap—those damn' things?"

"Then what did you let me put my money in for?"

"Ever shoot ducks, son?"

"Ducks?"

"Sure. They use decoys. Now listen, we got two hundred thousand shares of stock to sell, aint we? At five dollars a share, that's a million bucks. There aint nothing cheap about that."

"But—it's a swindle, a fake. It's—"

"Nuts," said Pyramid Jo succinctly, and he jerked his hat tightly over his eyes and walked out of the office, chewing on his cigar.

Bentley could take it or leave it!

ONE thing, however, that made for Bentley Dewert's peace of mind, was the disappearance of the DESTINY, P.M., door-sign on Pine Street, and the advent of other persons in his office. Surely, Ross and his crowd, even if they suspected that Vaporifex, Inc., was one and the same as John Destiny, would not

try any of their strong-arm methods there. Moreover, he had returned to his hotel, taking the precaution of bringing Mr. Jaffley to share his suite by the simple process of requesting the hotel to open a door which joined an unoccupied room to his own. Thus, he reasoned with some logic and more optimism, "those foreigners" would be stymied again. Or at least he would have the comfort of knowing that he would be not altogether alone while in the hotel.

And whether due to his reasoning or to circumstances unknown, there had been no sign of His One-eyed Highness' vengeful gentlemen Ross, Stuber or others. For all they seemed to take interest in John Destiny, he might never have beaten them at their own game and taken away from them fifty thousand dollars which was meant merely as a decoy.

IT had been, all in all, a quiet two weeks. As to the Graymasters, they did not intrude upon Dewert's horizon. Old Buntsman Graymaster, in comparative safety in a sanitarium, was forgotten by the press. His niece, in an edition now weeks old, was reported as "visiting friends," and henceforward did not break into the news. Even Ephraim Brood was out of town, or so his office reported him when Bentley telephoned twice with the intention of discussing Mr. Caddis' peculiar management of the new company's affairs.

But it proved to be only the calm before the storm. . . .

For the "storm" broke in mid-January, and it was Homer Lucretius Jaffley who gave it its impetus. For on the eighth day of the new year, Jaffley did not appear, as was his habit, at the door of the factory to join Dewert in his return to the hotel.

After waiting nearly half an hour, Dewert dismissed his taxicab and went to investigate. Pushing his way into the barren, empty loft which housed the purely theoretical "factory" of Vaporifex, Inc., Bentley located the little man in the sanctum which had been given him, busy at work on an amazing collection of pipes, tanks, nondescript vessels of metal, and a tangle of electric wires.

"Hello," he said, beaming innocently at his visitor. "I hoped you'd come on up. I have great news for you. Wonderful news!"

"Spill it, then."

"We're discarding the old vaporifex. I mean, I've made it obsolete."

"You *what!*" Bentley nearly shouted that.

"I've been working on a modification of the original vaporifex," announced Jaffley calmly, "which makes my original invention as obsolete as the old-fashioned tube-boiler. It's finished. It's the greatest day in my whole life, Mr. Destiny. Nothing can stop us now. We'll have the whole industrial world coming to us!"

Bentley managed to gasp:

"Hold everything! Do I understand you've discarded the vaporifex—after I've turned in fifty thousand dollars to a company, and after Jo Caddis has started selling stock?"

Jaffley nodded and beamed.

"Not quite, of course. But with my new development, we can simply walk away with all obstacles. No one can refuse us. Industry simply can't afford to be without it. Of course, it won't make any difference, will it?"

"Oh, no, not at all. But no! No difference at all, except we've been selling gold-bricks, selling stock in something that doesn't exist. Listen, you poor twerp: Caddis salesmen have been taking in actual cash by showing people your old-model machine and pictures in their prospectuses—even made some demonstrations at Caddis' office. And now you stand there and tell me you've made it obsolete? Isn't that just dandy!"

"But you don't understand. I—"

"I understand plenty. I understand I'm working with a nut, a crazy man. I'm a sucker—a fifty-thousand-dollar sucker. Okay, wonder-man! Now, just what is this miracle?"

Evidently Jaffley felt nothing of Bentley's bitter irony, but he jumped at the word *miracle*.

"Of course it's a miracle," he said with utter complacency. "It does away with steam altogether. It—"

Bentley felt suddenly faint.

"Please!" he said. "Please—I can't stand it. So now we've done away with steam, hey?"

"Come inside and let me show you," Jaffley insisted; and Bentley was almost dragged into the laboratory while the excited little inventor babbled away in queer high-pitched technical language.

"I've been working it out in my head for years, you see," he chattered. "As soon as I found about the binary system, I began to think—"

"The what?"

"Binary system. That's the general name for the most modern steam-gen-

eration system that uses mercury vapor as well as water vapor. You see—"

"Mercury? Quicksilver?"

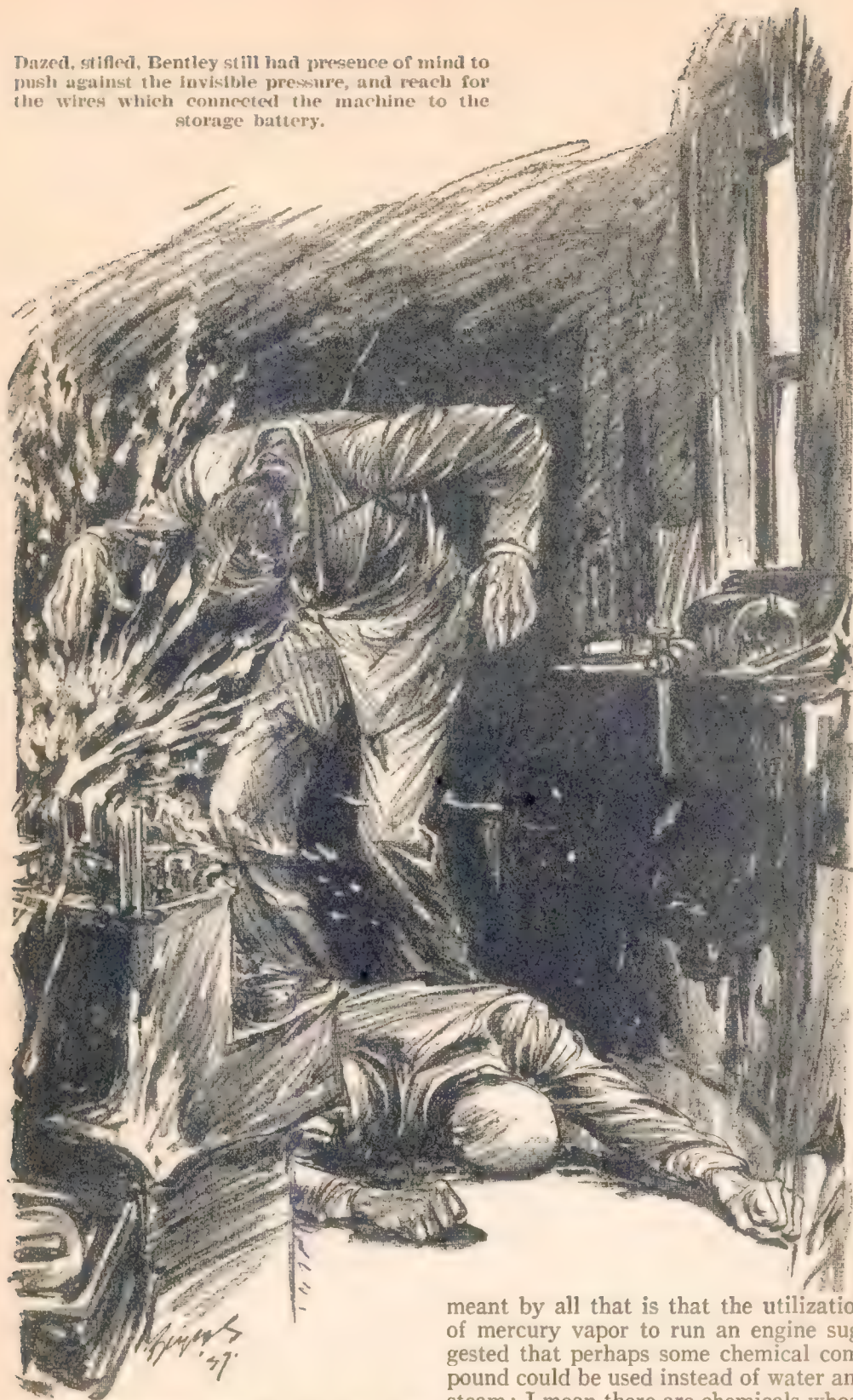
"That's right. Mercury vaporizes at 880 degrees and seventy pounds pressure. They operate a turbine from the vapor and send it back to a condenser, where it still has a temperature of 445 degrees, hot enough to turn water into steam,



which operates another engine, understand?"

"Oh, sure," said Bentley, a little too loudly. "Oh, sure, I understand. I'm practically an expert already, just listening to you, Jaffley. But just what is it

Dazed, stifled, Bentley still had presence of mind to push against the invisible pressure, and reach for the wires which connected the machine to the storage battery.



you've invented? This is all very instructive, you know; but where does it get us?"

"Of course," said Jaffley explanatorily, "I was forgetting to tell you. What I

meant by all that is that the utilization of mercury vapor to run an engine suggested that perhaps some chemical compound could be used instead of water and steam; I mean there are chemicals whose gas-expansion is greater than steam—"

"Yeah, they call 'em explosives," said Bentley acidly.

"I don't mean explosives. I mean that I have discovered a chemical compound

which makes gas under high temperature, just as water does, only its vaporization-point is lower than that of water, which means less energy spent for heat, and its expansion is five times greater than steam's, which means more horsepower per cubic unit of liquid volume. And so by using my electric vaporization method in combination with this— But come in and look at it. Please do. I know you think I'm a little crazy, but—"

"Just a little, Jaffley. Just a *little*! But I'll take a look."

JAFFLEY had erected a wooden barrier inside the laboratory, perhaps to shield his work from view. Behind this was a square metal box, bristling with meters, dials and knobs, while slender copper pipes ran from it to a small horizontal machine which, to Bentley, seemed an ordinary steam engine. As they approached, there was a noticeable odor, acrid and metallic, which seemed to linger over the long wooden table upon which Jaffley's experiment was erected. An electric storage battery and a five-gallon stone crock stood at the remote end of the table, while wires and a rubber tube ran from battery and crock to the mysterious metal box.

"There it is," chirped the little inventor. "This is only a model, of course; but it's an industrial revolution in miniature. Watch this, now."

Bentley, saying nothing, watched him.

Jaffley inserted a wooden rule into the stone crock and noted the depth of the liquid inside.

"There's barely a quart of liquid left," he said, "but that's enough. That little engine develops one horsepower under steam. There wouldn't be enough water in a quart to run it five minutes, but just see what happens now."

He turned a switch, released a valve in the rubber tubing, and stood with his eyes focused on the meters and gauges of the box.

"Less than a minute," he said, rather obscurely, and they both waited. Presently the needle in the meter moved. Jaffley turned three knobs excitedly, and at once the flywheel of the little engine began to turn. It gathered momentum. It gave forth wheezing sounds reminiscent of a steam engine in motion. Its speed increased; the four iron braces or spokes in the flywheel became a blur. The little engine seemed to quiver, then whine, then positively shake on its heavy iron base, while the roar of its valves

rose to a shrill, piercing note, and the whole floor began to tremble under the influence of vibration.

Jaffley turned a control; the pitch of sound lowered, fell into a monotone.

"There is potentially seven horsepower developed in that flywheel right now," said Jaffley. "Potentially, because of course we can't utilize it. The machine itself is too light. If I should try to use a belt and pulley and make it do seven horsepower in actual work, it would just pull itself right off the table. But you can see for yourself—"

And then it happened.

There was first a sharp hissing sound. Then the metal-covered box appeared to bulge like a balloon. The whole thing happened in a split second; but to Bentley, it seemed to be slow-motion. With a ripping noise, a soldered seam at the edge of the box gave way, and Bentley felt himself flung back by an invisible hand, as an acrid vapor assailed his nostrils—flung back until he brought up sharply against the wood and glass partition of the laboratory—while Jaffley screamed like a woman in agony.

The engine's whirling flywheel slowed and stopped. Its whine trailed off in a rapid diminuendo, lost in the cries of the inventor, who suddenly dropped to the floor and clutched frantically at his face.

IT was not, Bentley knew, an explosion—in the ordinary sense of the word. He had felt no true shock, no violent concussion. Yet he had been hurled back from the table with a force which was undeniable. The whole room seemed to be reeling. Suddenly glass shattered and the panes of the partition were pushed out by this same mysterious force.

Dazed, feeling stifled and a little nauseated from the fumes which stung his lungs and nose, Bentley had the presence of mind to push against the invisible pressure, holding his arm across his face, and to reach for the wires which connected the machine to the storage battery. Fortunately these were not heavy wires, and a jerk broke one of them free and cut off the electric circuit before a sensation of something like scalding began to sear the top of his head, his face and his hands and made him instinctively drop to the floor.

Just how long he remained there, motionless, he could not be sure. Jaffley's cries had become an inarticulate moan. Footsteps sounded in the corridor outside. Dewert managed to force himself

to a sitting position, just in time to see a man in worker's overalls dash into the laboratory, yelling:

"What the hell? What's going on here?" And then he made a dive for Jaffley, who had rolled under the table.

THE pain in Dewert's face was severe, but not unendurable. His hands felt raw and skinless. The metallic tang in his nostrils and air-passages lingered and its burning persisted, but otherwise, he felt, he was unhurt. He tried to get to his feet, but every movement seemed to be tearing the skin around his joints. The hissing noise had stopped; the queer breaking and bulging of the metal box from which, evidently, the trouble had come, had ceased. The engine's flywheel was turning slowly now and would come to a stop through its own gravity lag. More people had run into the laboratory. The first man had gathered Jaffley into his arms and was hurrying out. Some one was tugging at Dewert's waist, trying to get a hold.

"Let go," he managed to say. "I'm—I'm all right."

And by superhuman effort he got to his feet in spite of the burning and cracking sensation wherever his skin tightened as he moved.

Then he fainted. When consciousness returned, he was aware of rapid motion, and opening his eyes, could see the white immaculateness of the inside of an ambulance, while the scream of the siren beat painfully against his ear-drums. He lifted his head. It hurt a little, especially where the movement tightened the skin of his neck, but the sharp pain was gone. The back of a man in a white uniform was toward him.

"Hey!" he called out. "What happened? Am I hurt?"

The interne turned his head and gave him a careful look.

"You ought to know if you're hurt, feller," he said. "I'm damned if I know what happened. Explosion, maybe. Nobody seemed to know anything about anything."

"Where's Jaf— Where's the other fellow?"

The interne pointed to a companion cot, where a figure lay enshrouded in a blanket.

"Badly burned—or something like it. What did happen, son? You seem to be coming around all right."

Bentley tried to think. The interne got up from his seat and crawled toward

his cot, stooping in the cramped quarters, hanging tight to the cot as the ambulance swayed in its wild careering.

"It wasn't an explosion—not exactly. It was an experiment that went wrong, somehow. I feel as though I'd been skinned."

"You look it, too. Acid burn. What were you playing with?"

"Don't know. Wasn't my experiment. I was just a kibitzer. Is he bad?" He jerked a thumb, rather painfully, at Jaffley's cot. The interne nodded.

"Looks that way, but I can't tell yet. Scalded, I'd say. You fellows playing with steam?"

"No, not steam."

"Queer—we've never had a case like it."

"No," said Bentley bitterly. "I'll bet you didn't." And he added: "And you never will again—not if I can help it."

A FORTNIGHT had passed. Bentley, his burns superficial, had been retained in the hospital only a few hours after an application of tannic acid had taken the pain from his smarting skin; but Homer Lucretius Jaffley was in more serious condition. His face was one great blister. His eyes had been badly seared. His hands and the entire upper part of his body had suffered as though dipped in boiling water. But expert care and the passing of time eventually brought his release, though the hospital authorities were resentful of his attitude.

"You have it written down as acid burns," he told them. "Let it go at that." And though they were far from satisfied, that was all they could get from him.

To Bentley, however, he spoke more fully.

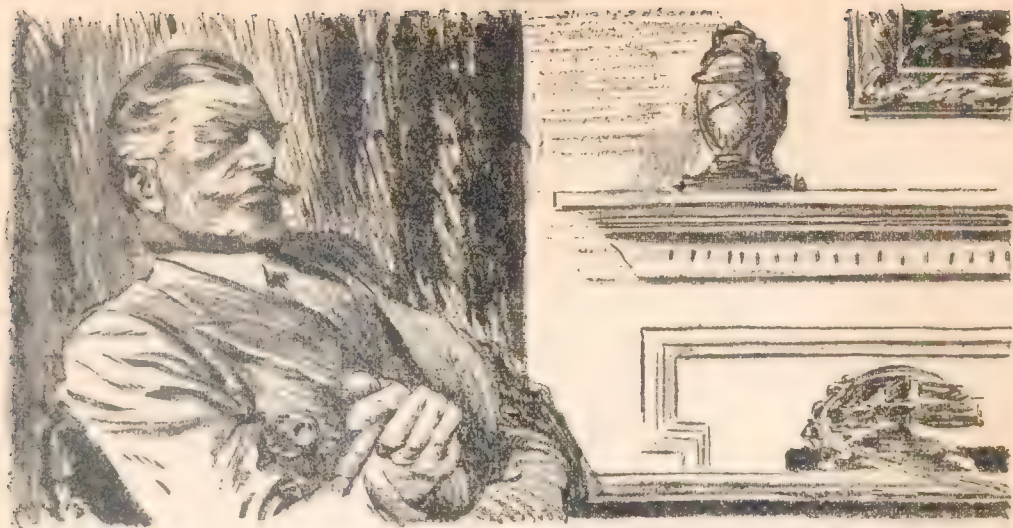
"Most extraordinary, most extraordinary indeed," he stated. "Practically impossible that a thing like this should happen."

"But it did happen—whatever it was."

Jaffley looked puzzled. "I'm not just sure myself," he said. "Unless the gases generated by heating the—the chemical preparation I used—assumed new properties when released and mixed with air. Lucky that cabinet was only soldered, or we'd have had an explosion."

"So we didn't have an explosion?"

"Oh, dear, no. Not really. The pressure forced the solder, which had softened under heat. Stupid of me, wasn't it? And of course the gases pushed out in their expansion. But next time, of course, there will be no such—"



"I think we might try other methods

"Jaffley," said Bentley, with a positive emphasis, "there isn't going to be any next time. I'm through. If you want to fool around with this and that, I don't care; but you can't do it on my money."

And he meant that.

JO CADDIS stared at Bentley Dewert coolly through the smoke of his inevitable cigar.

"So that's it, eh? You're gonna pull out, hey? Now, aint that somepin'?"

"That," agreed Bentley, "is something."

"Did you, by any chance, read the charter of Vaporifex, Incorporated? Have you studied corporation law? Listen, son: It's none of my business. I'm only a stock promoter, and merely secretary of the company; but there is a law, son, and I didn't make it. You don't have your fifty thousand dollars any more. You have some nice pretty stock-certificates instead. You can sell 'em, of course, if anybody wants to buy 'em; but—"

He gave Bentley an expressive wink.

"You're a crook, Caddis," Bentley said. "And a mean crook."

"Now, is that a nice way to talk? After I picked up your boy friend's gadget and tried to make a nickel for us all? Is that nice, I ask you, son? I thought you was smart, feller. Maybe I was wrong."

"I want my money."

"Yeah, and what about ten thousand shares my boys have sold, more or less? Who gives what to who, and who gets stuck?"

"You sold ten thousand shares of Vaporifex Corporation?"

"Sure—more or less. Maybe a little less, and that aint all."

"Spill it."

"Didja think I was loafin'? Didja think I was kiddin'? Aint I in the stock-promotion business, now? Aint I got the boys lined up to take in a million bucks? Aint we got a factory and a laboratory for your genius-friend, and aint you got an office full of people, with nothin' to do but draw your salary?"

"Forget the frills, Caddis."

"Frills, is it? Listen, son: You aint got no idea what it takes to manufacture a machine and put it on the market. It costs money. Fifty thousand dollars aint enough. Nor a hundred thousand. Not unless you want to start small and wait twenty, thirty years, and in the meantime somebody comes along and puts the bee on you, or gets the banks to refuse to finance you, or bribes a court to show your patent is no good, or maybe goes out and makes another gadget that's just a little different than yours, only it's got a big name behind it, so you get squeezed out. Then what? Then all your stockholders get gypped. You lose your money and your plant. And pretty soon all that's left of you is a record in the bankruptcy courts—after twenty or thirty years of climbing until you almost get somewhere. Maybe that's what you want, son; but that aint my way."

"It's the decent, honest way."

"It's a fool's way."

"Plenty of good business started that way. Look at the automobile corporations today which started as bicycle-shops, or maybe carriage-makers. There isn't really any short-cut, Caddis. And I'm not cutting corners while I'm an officer in this firm."

"You been readin' books, son. You hear all about those fine old firms that



of eliminating this—ah—menace.”

started from nothing and got to be something; but you don’t hear about the others—the flops, the bankrupts, the crowded-outs. Business fashions change, son. We’re out of the pioneer days now. Get modern.”

“I’ll stay honest, thanks. Now, listen here, Caddis: If I can’t take my money out, I’ll sell out—for what I can get. So will Jaffley. We —”

Caddis was suddenly more serious.

“Don’t do that, son. Hold your horses. I been kidding you a little. Things are just before happening here. We aint doing so bad. Remember what I said about decoys? Well, the ducks are comin’ around. Hold on awhile and keep cool.”

“What does that mean?”

“New World Fuels.”

“Oh—” It was a slow, hesitant “Oh,” but it came out. Bentley had forgotten about New World Fuels. Perhaps this Caddis wasn’t quite such a— “What about them?” he cried.

“Listen here,” Caddis began, reaching for a new cigar and settling himself more comfortably at his desk. “Remember what I told you that day about Ryster? Big shots never know when they’ve got enough. Always want to grab candy away from all the little kids. Want to go whole hog. Never let anybody play in their back yard. Well, Ryster has plenty like him. New Worlds is made up of guys like Ryster—only maybe worse.”

“I’m listening.” Bentley was not quite ready to banish his distrust of this rough little broker.

“Well, I tell you, son, maybe you didn’t know it, but we’ve been playing kids. Little kids with candy. Now the big kids are ready to grab it. Take a look

at this report from five of my out-of-town offices, and see what you think.”

And he handed Bentley a long, important-looking document, neatly typed.

MORRIS LEVERFORD, chairman of the board of New World Fuels, is a big man, physically, socially, financially and politically. Seated across the table from him was Abel Sundley, whose name is almost synonymous with the great fuel industry of America. When the old-time combine was slit into smaller, independent corporations by the monopoly laws, Mr. Abel Sundley saw where one man’s bane might be another’s good fortune—and he forthwith acted upon his vision.

While the public, possibly, has never heard Abel Sundley’s name mentioned, while the newspapers have never obtained an interview or a photograph, those who deal in vast tonnages of fuel oil, gasoline and crude petroleum suspect that Mrs. Sundley’s personal fortune is augmented by one penny nearly every time a gallon of crude oil is taken from Mother Earth and transported to pipe-line, distillery or storage. Taken by and large, if it were possible to say that two individuals in America represented the absolute monarchy of industrial fuels in a kind of dual unity, then Messrs. Leverford and Sundley are those two individuals.

And it may well be credited that when two such powers, who live the entire continent apart most of the year, are assembled in one small office behind carefully locked doors with a battery of competent secretaries to bar the way to any who might desire to converse with them, something very unusual is afoot.

And indeed something quite unusual was brewing.

It was three o'clock. Mr. Leverford waited in silence until the door closed; then he stood up, crossed the room, and carefully locked it. Then he returned to the table, while Mr. Sundley, smaller in bulk but equal in importance, followed his movements with unsmiling eyes.

"I think we have managed to elude spies and reporters, sir," said Mr. Leverford, whose tone carried a respect which he seldom showed to other mere mortals. "This situation is so urgent that I was forced to use somewhat—ah—romantic methods in getting you here without being recognized, Mr. Sundley."

"It must be. Frankly, I was a little resentful of all this secrecy—curtained cars and sneaking around the back way. We are a trifle less—shall I say timid? out in California. However, no matter. What is the situation?"

"Bluntly, this: There is a device which is about to be offered to industry which, in five years, if it is smartly handled, could put us all out of business."

SUNDLEY smiled wryly. "Rather a statement," he said.

"Quite a statement, but quite a fact, also. I mean that it would reduce the national consumption of coal and petroleum by seventy-five per cent. I mean that carried out to its logical conclusion, neither coal, oil, gas or any other usual fuel would be burned in a single steam-producing plant in the United States. I mean that the automobile industry would revert to steam again. I mean that it is even likely that hydro-electric plants would suffice for the entire power problem of the country, perhaps the world. I mean that—"

"Just a moment, Mr. Leverford. Pardon my frankness when I say that this sounds—ah—as though you had been reading one of these pseudo-scientific magazines. Would you be suggesting that some one has found the solution for atomic energy? Or sun energy, perhaps? Really, sir, for a man of your—"

"Nothing quite so fantastic—unfortunately," Leverford denied. "Something far more actual and practical. A new process for generating steam—entirely by electricity."

"Electricity requires coal or oil or some fuel."

"Quite. But when you consider that bituminous coal, as you know, furnishes fifty-three per cent of the nation's energy,

anthracite eight per cent, and the remainder largely petroleum—then you have the key to this problem. If electricity can be produced by water-power alone, and transported over the country—"

"Absurd, my dear Leverford."

"So that by the consumption of no more energy than would run a one-hundred-watt bulb, eight thousand horsepower can be developed without any boiler plant at all—"

"My dear Leverford—"

"And the heating of houses is done entirely by a few cents' worth of electricity instead of the usual furnace and boiler or oil burner—right there, Mr. Sundley, you have the total abandonment of anthracite, and the diminishing of bituminous and petroleum consumption by just about three-quarters—even more."

"Granted—if!"

"Well, it's here, sir."

"What is?"

"A machine which makes steam boilers obsolete—using electric heat, and capturing steam by the drop-of-water-on-a-hot-plate method. Call it what you like, the thing is now ready for introduction to industry."

"I find it difficult to believe, sir."

"So did I. Until my lawyers and my engineers looked into it. It's the invention of a poor little crackpot who is more dreamer than business man. I tried to buy his patent. Offered him twenty thousand dollars. But he laughed at it. I thought he would quit. Thought he would merely die of starvation because nobody took him seriously and because he is—well, a genius, I suppose, with a bad case of egomania. But it seems I was wrong."

"Wrong?"

"He is being financed. Look here!"

He produced a large, ornate piece of silk paper, patently a stock-certificate.

Mr. Sundley examined it.

"All the earmarks of a blue-sky promotion," he said. "Hardly disturbing."

"They have a manufacturing plant. They have fifty thousand dollars capital. And this blue-sky stock, as you call it, is being sold like hot cakes by the smartest crew of hit-and-run stock salesmen in the business."

FOR a moment Sundley was meditative; then he said in his slow, suave way:

"But it appears to be obvious, Leverford, that we could—ah—absorb this in-

ipient menace merely by purchasing their stock. There still seems to be no problem."

"Not so simple. In fact, it's the reason I sent for you. It will require a special fund to be voted, Sundley. It will meet with considerable objection, too. I am convinced that not one out of ten voting members of New World's board will be convinced of any menace such as I have described to you. In other words, I want you on my side, Sundley. I want your weight. We'll need it. This thing is an actuality. In ten years, if this vaporifex thing is even half as successful as my engineers claim it could be, the fuel industry as we know it will be almost an anachronism. We have a chance right now to buy control of this firm, if we're smart; but it will cost money—big money. You'd almost think that somebody had planned it and had foreseen just such a move on our part."

"How much money?"

"One million dollars!"

Sundley whistled briefly; then he shook his head and said:

"I'm afraid it's out of the question, Leverford. I'd recommend action for you, of course; but I doubt if a loose affiliation like New World can force its members to toss up a million in cash. One hears of such sums, but you don't actually handle a cold million any more. Not since 1929. I think we might better try other methods of—ah—eliminating this menace—if you're positive that it isn't just a queer fiction."

Leverford was a little angry.

"Fiction, hell!" he said flatly. "I tell you I've seen a demonstration of this damned machine. It's real. Crude in a sense—the model, I mean. But let some competent engineering staff go to work on design and application of that crazy little genius' principle, and there'll be an industrial revolution. And we've got to raise the money. If you'll add your voice to mine, I feel we can convince the members—"

"Possibly, but I doubt it. Also, it will cause talk. Not all of our members are—entirely discreet. I doubt if half of them even know what the affiliation's real purpose is. In fact, I suspect that most of the small-fry membership are convinced that we're a sort of anti-labor-trouble grouping to stand firm in case of strikes, or else a political lobby. You would never make people like that agree to contribute as much as a thousand dollars to any cause which, to them, would

seem so remote and incredible. But I did mention other means. You spoke of the old steam automobile, just now. Steam automobiles are said to have been killed by forced publicity of an adverse nature. Now in this case, I think—"

"It won't work. Short of outright murder, we can't stop them from putting some form of this machine on the market, and, frankly, I doubt if murder would accomplish it. No sir, we've got to buy the patent or the organization. I'm so serious about this that I will be glad to contribute a quarter of a million out of my own pocket. If you will do as much, we can raise the rest."

"I see your point," said Sundley. "I see your point."

And both men remained silent for several minutes.

THE voice of Jo Caddis on the phone was not natural. Evidently he was in a serious mood. Evidently he was either angry or worried, or both.

"Destiny? Now listen and shut up. You get out of that hotel and down here to my office and do it fast. Bring Jaffley. This is a board-of-directors meeting. This is important. Get started."

"What's wrong, Mr. Caddis?"

"I said come down here, both of you. Shut up and get going."

Then came the sound of a receiver being crashed onto its hook.

Bentley Dewert dressed himself. He had been lazing that morning. For the first time in many weeks he had felt relaxed, had felt at ease. Jo Caddis had convinced him that the little system he had planned was the right system. It stood up with Dewert's own. It had something of Personal Mystery about it. Let the New World Fuels worry. Let them wonder about this stock promotion called Vaporifex. Soon enough they would try to make a grab. They would send agents out all over the country to buy in a controlling interest in the new company, and then they'd see to it that the Vaporifex was never offered to industry. They'd be quiet about it. They'd do things in a big way, quietly, dangerously, ponderously. Big business was often like that. But it would cost them a million dollars, and even if you split a million dollars three ways, you have quite a bit of money. What if they did absorb Vaporifex? What if they did keep it from making inroads into industry? A million dollars would heal all that. Even Jaffley ought to be satisfied

with that. Let them grab the company. Let them outsmart themselves. Let them buy up all the controlling stock through dummies. That would be just fine. Jaffley could play with his new inventions and be happy. He could still think he was going to do away with steam and be a second Isaac Watts or anybody he fancied. He'd stand to make half a million, the way the stock was divided. Jaffley wouldn't lose. And a lot of coal and oil employees wouldn't lose their jobs. And Bentley could make up his deficit to Brood's hypothetical income rate—and considerably more, too. Let New World be just as smart as they wanted—for a million dollars, why not? Hand it to Jo Caddis; he was plenty smart.

That was the general feeling, until just now. Just now, with Caddis talking over the wire in that peculiar strained voice, something might be wrong. Well, he'd hurry downtown and find out the worst. He'd pull Jaffley out of bed and hurry down. Queer about Jaffley, too. Generally he was up and stirring around eight o'clock. Maybe he overslept, though. Never had been quite the same after that bad burn he had received.

"Hey, Jaffley!"

But there was no answer. There was none of the usual birdlike fluttering in Jaffley's room, none of the usual chatter and babble.

"Hey, Jaffley!"

Still no answer. Dewert opened the connecting door and peered into Jaffley's room. The bed was empty.

Downstairs in the lobby the room clerk was informative only to a degree. Yes, Mr. Jaffley had gone out. Sorry, sir, but he left no message. A gentleman had called to see him. No sir, he did not leave a name.

BENTLEY found Jo Caddis in the little inside office where, of custom, he hid himself when interruptions might be unwelcome. His usual grin and his rough affability were absent.

"Where the hell is your boy friend?" That was his first sharpshooting question as Bentley was shown in.

"Jaffley's out, somewhere. Left early and didn't tell me. What's wrong, Mr. Caddis?"

"Everything's wrong. We're sunk."

"How?"

"I can't figure it myself. I gotta handful of letters from my boys in Cleveland, Cincinnati, Chicago and a lot of other cities, see? They was doin' swell.

This Fuels crowd was eatin' out of our hand. Yesterday I had wires from all my boys. They had just about sold out the whole works. Chicago had an order for one hundred thousand shares alone—that was the Ludwig Basten Coal Company in the name of Arthur Basten. Well, Basten is vice president of Leverford Brothers, the anthracite people. And Leverford is the big shot of Fuels. So I was just singing to myself, when Charley Niles wires me from Chi that he gets Bassen down for a big deal like that, because I see Leverford is behind him, see?"

"Not altogether, but go ahead."

"Well, it's the New World Fuels working through Basten, trying to grab a controlling interest in our corporation. So I'm happy. Then comes Bill Southy with a wire from Frisco, saying he's got a sale of twenty-five thousand shares tied up with Ellis McNulty of the Petroleum Bank. That's another member of Fuels. And more wires come in from Cleveland, Cincy and Philly, all saying they've got either options or actual cash sales which total enough to make up our million."

"WELL, Jo, that's pretty good. What are you bellyaching about?"

"Plenty. This morning comes more wires. Night letters. Basten's check for half a million is stop payment. McNulty's never came. He calls the deal off. Cleveland and Cincy report ditto and ditto. Philly goes through with a small sale of five thousand shares to some sucker which is nothing to do with Fuels. Now laugh that off."

"I—I don't understand."

"No? Well, in plain English, New World Fuels was biting at our bait. It was in the bag. And then suddenly they crawled. They're off us. They dropped us like a hot potato. All we got is a fake stock promotion which might sell fifty thousand shares, with luck, over two years' time. Catch?"

"I see what you mean, but—"

"But you don't see why? Neither do I. What I called you down here for—Where the devil is that secondhand genius? He's got to have a voice in this. I called you down here because I gotta admit I flopped. We're going to pull out. We're going to forget there ever was a Vaporifex Corporation. I aint interested in just selling stock. I can get lots better stock to sell. This aint a promotion; this was a gag. And now it's all over. I'm a sucker. You trusted me,

Destiny. I know you think I'm a crook, see? I don't care what you think. But I let you in for a fifty-thousand-dollar loss, and I'll make it right. I'll give you a check right now for—"

The telephone rang. Caddis snatched the instrument and roared into it,

"Yes! Hello, *hello!* What's that? Oh, it's you, is it! Now you listen here, Jaffley, you grab a taxicab and come right down here. That's all, you just arrive. Sure, he's here. Been here for an hour. Don't talk, just move. What's that? Sure, there's something wrong. I'll tell you what's wrong, we aint got no company, and you aint got no sugar daddy any more to pay for your tinkering. That's straight. Get in a cab and come down here, and I'll tell you more of the same."

He hung up viciously.

"He's full of something," said Jo. "I don't even think he knows what I told him. If he wasn't such a pitiful sap, I'd be sorry for him. These inventors are all screwy. Now listen, Destiny: sit tight, and I'll write you a check."

Bentley was just recovering.

"You mean—you mean you're going to pay me back my fifty thousand, Mr. Caddis? I can't let you—"

"The hell you can't. You can't stop me. Maybe I'm a crook like you think, but I'm not that kind of a crook. Shut up and take your money."

And he opened his check-book.

JAFFLEY came in like the south wind with a twitter of birds in it. He was flushed and happy. He had been chattering blithely with the office-boy who showed him into Caddis' private office, and his squeaky voice preceded him through the door.

"Of course," he began breathlessly, plunging into the middle of something before making a beginning, "of course, I ought to have taken you with me, Mr. Destiny. I know I shouldn't have gone off and done it myself; but you see, I'm so terribly impetuous. It's a failing I must conquer, I know—"

"Shut up. Never mind all that, Jaffley," Jo Caddis broke in, "I called you down here to tell you that your vaporifex is finished. We're licked. I'm sorry, but that's the way it is. You'll have to try somebody else, unless Destiny here is fool enough to finance you on a small scale, and—"

"Licked? Vaporifex? Oh, no, you don't mean that, Mr. Caddis!" Jaffley's tone was neither rueful nor credulous. "I'm sure you couldn't have found out. I don't see how it's possible. Of course, I was wrong to go ahead myself, but I've done it now, so—"

"What in blue blazes are you talking about?"

"Vaporifex, of course. We don't own it any more."

"Whaddya mean we don't own it?"

"Because I've just sold the patent."

"You what?"

"Well, you see, this man came to the hotel this morning and asked for me. I didn't know who he was, and I didn't want to wake Mr. Destiny. I went downstairs, and there was this person. His name is Leverford."

"Huh?"

"Yes, a Mr. Leverford. He seemed so very anxious to buy the patent, you see. I know I'm no business man, but I've always determined that I'd never sell out under a million dollars. Not for the money itself, but the principle of the thing. I think inventors are always being cheated and robbed, don't you? Well, Mr. Leverford tried to talk me into selling it. Of course, I know that the vaporifex is no good now—not with my new gas-pressure system. But I didn't tell him that. I told him I'd sell a part of the patent—that is, one of the patents. I wanted to keep my electric heat-generation unit, because you see I'll need that with the new gas-pressure generator. So finally he agreed. Perhaps it wasn't honest of me not to tell him that the vaporifex is obsolete before it is actually working, but he rushed me so much, and he was so very insistent, that I simply had to give in. . . . I hope you don't mind? I hope it won't make any difference to the company, Mr. Caddis?"

CADDIS was breathing heavily. His voice was a husky whisper.

"Jaffley, did—you—sell—that—patent?"

"Oh, yes, of course." Very brightly.

"How much?"

"Well, since it was only half the patent, actually, I gave in for five hundred thousand dollars. Perhaps I was wrong, but I'm such a poor business man—"

The thudding sound was caused by the collapse of Jo Caddis; the choking sound came from Bentley Dewert's throat.



Retreat

By TRACY

THE revolution was young; the Rebel army still little better than a mob, but we had forced our way through a jungle thought to be impassable and had thrown up hasty barricades.

The enemy started firing long before they had sighted us. Bullets sprayed the tree-tops; and now and then some of them would come close enough to earth to remind us that any bullet that hits can kill.

Grimly confident, we waited. Conrad, with the rank of general, was in charge of the foreigners. My friend Sam had parked himself behind a log, and with plenty of ammunition for his rifle and a bottle of *guara*—native rum—at his side, he boasted he would teach the Federals a lesson. Next to Conrad sat Big Swede Charley and I with the pride of the Rebel army, a machine-gun, the music-master of revolutions.

For convenience of transportation, the ammunition supply for the machine-gun and what extra ammunition we had for the rifles had been taken from its original packages and put in burlap bags, twenty pounds to the bag. We had four belt boxes for the machine-gun, holding a loaded web belt of two hundred and fifty cartridges each. That would be a mere trifle for a jungle battle in the tropics, so we had the belt-loading machine set up behind a stump, and a crew of natives ready to start filling belts as fast as we emptied them through the machine-gun.

Our machine-gun was seven mm. caliber. Some of the rifles were seven mm. but many of them were of other calibers. There were even a few shotguns and old trade muskets.

We could not see the Federals but the volume of their firing increased. Their bullets were coming closer, and already there were casualties. Our native soldiers were answering the Federal fire with a right good will, and no doubt their bullets were also damaging the tree-tops a plenty. None of the foreigners were firing, Conrad keeping them in check until they could see their target. Likewise

our machine-gun remained cold. We wanted to use it as a surprise when we had a good target.

But some of the Rebel officers had other ideas; and after all, they were the ones giving the orders.

"*Musical!*" was the cry that came down the line, "*Musical!*" And then an order came direct from the General himself to open up on the enemy with the machine-gun.

"All right," growled General Conrad disgustedly. "If it's music they want, let 'em have it, Tracy."

I pressed the trigger and sent a spray of bullets sweeping through the jungle in front of us; and instantly there was a noticeable decrease in the volume of Federal fire. I made sure none of my bullets were going into the tree-tops; but what the actual results were we could only guess.

"*Mas musica! Mas musica!*" came a chant from down the line as cheers greeted the sound of the machine-gun fire. While I threaded a new belt into the gun, Big Charley tossed the empty web to the men at the loading machine, and they dug into the burlap bag for cartridges.

The gun bucked and chattered but functioned perfectly as I emptied another beltful of cartridges into the jungle, and the fire of the Federals almost died out. The second belt went to the loading-machine and I emptied the third without a pause. The Rebels were now standing on top of their trenches and firing wildly in the general direction of the Federals. One of the loaders brought forward two newly loaded belts, and I threaded one of them into the gun.

Rat-a-tat! A dozen shots fired smoothly in response to my finger on the trigger; then the gun jammed. A hasty inspection showed a cartridge had failed to enter the chamber of the gun. I held the gas lever back to clear the breach while Big Charley drove out the faulty cartridge with a cleaning rod. I levered another cartridge into place and again the

REAL EX-

to Victory

RICHARDSON

The truth that is sometimes as strange as fiction makes the stories contributed by our readers in this department specially noteworthy. (For details of our Real Experience contest, see page 3.) First a noted soldier of fortune tells of a strange battle.

gun started off, only to stop after a dozen rounds. Another cartridge had stuck.

It took us five minutes to get that cartridge out, and as we worked and cursed, the Federal fire increased. I caught the shell as it finally came free, and at first could see no reason for its having jammed; then I spotted the trouble: it was an eleven mm. cartridge. The puzzle was how had the eleven mm. cartridges got in with the sevens. We had no guns that used eleven mm. ammunition.

We spent most of the next hour clearing jams from the machine-gun and the belt, and during that time we only fired two belts or five hundred rounds, not enough to intimidate the Federals. They were in sight, dodging from tree to tree and keeping up steady fire. The surgeon had his hands full now. Then our leader caught one through the abdomen. Some of the boys helped him back to the doctor, trying to keep him out of sight of the natives, for the sight of a wounded American was bad for them. It was plenty bad for us foreigners as well, for we all had a lot of respect for him.

Every cartridge that went into the machine-gun belt had to be inspected; and the natives loading the belts did not seem able to distinguish the difference in the calibers, so Charley and I had to check every belt that was brought to us, take out the misfits and replace them with the correct ammunition—which delayed us so that our machine-gun fire was not much more effective than ordinary rifle-fire. The Federals were close, and our men were breaking under their fire. On all sides they were talking retreat. One of the Swedes and a German were sent to help the General to safety in the rear, for an American who fell into the hands of the Federals got short shrift.

Soldiers were sneaking off to the rear, and others were getting their few belongings wrapped in their blankets, preparatory to retreating. Finally word came to get the machine-gun away: they were

going to retire to the river and make a stand there.

The machine-gun was hot. Big Charley and I had both blistered our hands while correcting jams. Cursing, we took it down and distributed the ammunition-boxes among the natives. The few foreigners were keeping up a sharp fire to cover our retirement; judging from their shouts, they were having some good shooting—and most of them were expert shots.

Suddenly there was a pause in the firing, one of those incomprehensible things that can only be accounted for by stupefaction. Federal and Rebel fire almost ceased. I looked for the cause.

STANDING on the log that had served him for cover was my friend Sam, fully exposed to the Federal fire; and they were so close they could scarcely have missed. Sam had his rifle in one hand and his bottle of *guara*, almost empty, in the other. He waved the bottle, and in a voice that seemed to boom through the silence, he shouted:

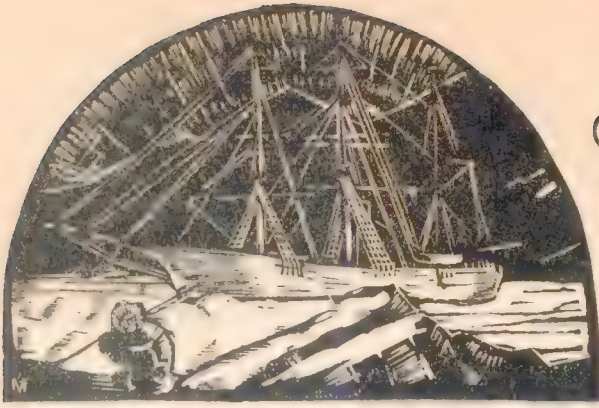
"Vell, what the hell we waiting for? If we're going to run, let's go! Come on!"

Sam plunged off the log; his short pudgy legs drove him forward, not in retreat, but straight toward the Federals. For a moment the silence held; Sam made fifty feet toward the Federal lines, and they were firing again.

Somewhere down the line a bull-like voice roared out: "*La machete! La machete!*" A roar swept up and down the lines. This was something they knew and liked. Rifles and blankets were discarded, and with machetes swinging, they charged forward at Sam's heels, voices roaring insults to the enemy.

It was a rout. The battle was over, won, the only battle on record where an army retreated in the wrong direction and won a war, for that was what it really amounted to; and to this day they still toast my friend Sam, the man who retreated to victory.

PERIENCES



Arctic

The author of "Siberian Trader" tells of his voyage to rescue the Karluk survivors.

WHEN I reached Seattle, I learned more about the Stefansson expedition than I had been able to learn at Nome. The *Karluk*, steaming to the north, had been caught in the ice, and because it had been short of fresh meat, Stefansson, Burt McConnell and Wilkins had left it to go ashore and get some caribou. During their stay ashore, the ice-pack broke loose and drifted to the westward, taking the *Karluk* with it.

But much as I regretted the possibility that so gallant an explorer as Stefansson had perished, and that perhaps his crew were in desperate need of rescue, my principal job was to take care of my own people and the *Belvedere*, which I had left frozen fast in the ice at Icy Reef near Demarcation Point. For with Captain Pedersen's crew from the *Elvira* aboard, they would be embarrassingly short of supplies in the spring.

So when we outfitted the *King and Winge* in Seattle and started north with her the following spring, it was principally to take supplies to the *Belvedere* and continue with a regular trading-trip. We met her, replenished her, and made our regular trip along the Siberian coast, then called at Nome. Here, for the first time, I met Burt McConnell.

Meanwhile Captain Pedersen had replaced the *Elvira* with the *Herman*, and at Emma Harbor, Siberia, had picked up Captain Bob Bartlett, commander of the *Karluk*, who brought news that the *Karluk* had been crushed by the ice near Wrangel Island and sunk. Several of the expedition had left in advance of Bartlett's main party in an attempt to reach land quickly and had been lost. The rest, proceeding more cautiously with Bartlett, had eventually reached Wrangel Island and were in desperate straits. Bartlett had risked the dangers of crossing a hundred miles of hazardous ice with one of the Eskimos in his party to the Siberian mainland in order to get news to the world of the *Karluk's* plight.

Bartlett had made the trip from the island to the mainland, a distance shown as 110 miles on the chart, but which is actually several hundred miles to a man walking around open water and hummocks among the most hazardous ice conditions imaginable. It had taken him thirty days to make the trip—an average speed of three or four miles a day, and is to me evidence of extraordinary skill on ice.

From Saint Michaels Captain Bartlett had sent news to the Government of the plight of the *Karluk* crew; and two United States revenue cutters, the *Bear* and the *Thetis*, had been detailed to try to get the men off the island. Meanwhile the Russian government had also sent two icebreakers, the *Taimyr* and the *Vaigatch*, which were to make the same attempt. But although these four boats had headed for Wrangel, none of them had actually been able to get through the closely packed ice. . . .

When I met Burt McConnell, he urged me to make the attempt to take the men off in the *King and Winge*, and took me to see Captain Bartlett, who added his plea to that of McConnell. Meanwhile Captain L. L. Lane, whom Pedersen and I had raced across Alaska, was in the northern waters again, aboard the *Polar Bear*. It will be remembered that up to this time, even when news of the crew of the *Karluk* reached civilization, the general impression was that Stefansson and Wilkins, who had become separated from the party, had been lost on the ice. It is easy, then, to imagine Captain Lane's surprise when, cruising near Cape Kellett, he ran into Stefansson. Stefansson tells the story of Lane's "rescue" of him in "The Friendly Arctic."

When I got to the end of the sandspit, half a mile from the ship, a whaleboat was lowered and came towards land with six men rowing and three or four passengers. Through my binoculars I recognized Captain Lane, Constable Jack Parsons of the

Rescue

By CAPTAIN
OLAF SWENSON

Herschel Island Mounted Police, and Herman Kilian, engineer of the *Polar Bear*. Presently I heard from the approaching boat shouts of "He's not an Eskimo. He's got field glasses—he must be one of the crew of the *Sachs*." Presently I heard Constable Parsons say, "I think that's Stefansson," to which Captain Lane replied, "Don't you think it. The fishes ate him long ago." A few yards nearer I heard Kilian say, "By God, that is Stefansson." There were contradictions from several others, but my identification was soon agreed on and Captain Lane shouted an order: "Don't a damn one of you move till I shake hands with him!" The boat touched the beach and the Captain jumped out. His men delayed just long enough to obey him and then scrambled out after, and I received the most enthusiastic welcome of my whole life.

Assuredly the idea most definitely connected with the Arctic seems to be one of starvation, and Captain Lane's first thought was what he could give me to eat. He said he had the best cook that ever came to the Arctic, and that the ship was full of good things. Now, what would I like? I had only to say what I wanted and the cook would prepare me the finest dinner I ever saw. I tried to make clear that while I was hungry for news, my appetite for food was very slight. In fact, the excitement had taken away what little I might have had.

I finally consented to make the attempt, and we started out on the *King and Winge*. Burt McConnell came along as a guest and companion, and Captain Bartlett went back on the revenue cutter *Bear*. When you start out on a job like this in the Arctic, it does not cancel the attempts of anyone else, for no one knows whether he is going to get through or not, and every ship that attempts it takes chances of failure and disaster; so the *Bear* went right on with her efforts, while we went about making our try.

We headed first for East Cape, because I wanted some natives and some skin boats for the work that was ahead of us. The natives' boats, all made by hand according to the most primitive methods, and using only the materials which their own region affords, are the best boats for work at close quarters in the frozen seas of the North. They are light enough so that they can be carried over the ice, yet strong enough and elastic enough to withstand pressures from the ice which would demolish a factory-made product of America. With one of these skin boats, (or umiak) thirty-five natives and some dogs, we headed for Wrangel Island. I knew that if we were blocked by the ice as the *Bear* had been, we could, with any luck at all, reach the island with the umiak, which could be dragged over the ice by the natives, launched whenever we reached a patch of open water, pulled out again if we encountered another ice-field, and the process repeated over and over again for a hundred miles if necessary.

OUR trip to Wrangel Island was about six hundred miles. For the first four hundred we encountered little ice. Then gradually ice-floes began to appear, which increased in number. Some were black with walrus, and the crew looked at them with longing eyes, but we did not stop. Soon we were in ice in earnest; and the plucky little *King and Winge* had to dodge and turn in every direction, back up and start over again as she plowed her way through. Sometimes, at full speed ahead, she would literally climb up on an ice-floe, her prow sliding over the edge like a polar bear's paws until she had broken it down with her own weight. Fortunately, Captain Jochimsen was a veteran in the ice, and knew and used every trick.

For eighty miles we fought the ice, sometimes passing ridges almost as tall as our masts, and we never would have got through had it not been for the skill and courage and persistence of Captain Jochimsen and the stanchness of the *King and Winge* herself.

As we came within sight of the sandy beach of Rodgers Harbor, where Captain Bartlett had told us we would find the men, we saw scant signs of human life. There were a small tent, a flagpole and a cross visible; but we saw no men, no dogs and no sleds. We crowded the deck and watched with something like awe and very little to say to each other, while

the chief engineer blew repeated long blasts on the whistle; but for a long time there was no sign of life whatever on the island. Finally one man came slowly from the tent, looking confused and a little startled, and brushing his hand across his eyes as if he could scarcely believe what he saw. Then he turned slowly, and going back into the tent, emerged in a moment with the British flag, which he raised on the flag-pole. Two other men came out of the tent and stood staring at us without any signs of excitement or even welcome. They simply seemed stupefied.

We lowered the skin boat and started ashore with some natives. As the umiak approached, one of the men detached himself from the group and ran down to the beach with a rifle in his hand, pumping it madly; and the natives who had been paddling suddenly stopped and began to back-paddle, apparently thinking that he was going to shoot them. They kept saying that he was crazy, and wanted to go back to the boat; but I calmed them and we went on. Later we found out what he was doing was emptying all the shells out, whether in sheer confusion, or to assure us that he was unarmed, I didn't know; but in a sense, it had the same effect as a salute fired from a warship, to prove to an approaching vessel that the guns are empty.

Just what went through the natives' minds I did not know; but after consenting to go ahead and approach the man they were convinced was crazy, they got on the beach and all quite solemnly began to turn somersaults. I never was able to get an explanation of why they did this, but I think it was motivated by some superstition, some feeling that they were going to have to appease this mad white god.

BY now the other two men had come to the beach, and though all three of them were men with whom Burt McConnell had been closely associated on the *Karluk*, he could not recognize any one of them. Their haggard, sunken eyes were almost concealed by the shaggy mops of hair which hung over them. Their faces were like the faces of no man I have ever seen in my life. They were filthy with dirt, emaciated, furrowed with wrinkles, and covered with sores. Their clothes, in which they had lived and slept for seven months, were in tatters; and the drawn, tense bright eyes told more volubly than any words

could, the story of their suffering and increasing hopelessness.

For more than a month they had been living on white-fox carcasses. Wrangel Island is a breeding-place for white fox in the summer-time, so that there were plenty of them; and as the men were not equipped with boats and could do little seal-hunting, they were forced to fall back on the white fox, an animal whose flesh the natives won't touch, and neither will the natives' dogs, even if they are half starving. The fat is terribly strong, and all the flesh is nauseating; yet these men had had practically nothing else to eat for over a month.

WHEN we had calmed down a little and found we were able to talk to each other, we discovered that the man who had greeted us with his rifle was James Munro, chief engineer of the *Karluk*, who had been left in command of the island when Bartlett made his ice trip to Siberia. The other two men were Templeman, the steward, and F. W. Maurer. Years later Maurer, with two or three other men, went back to Wrangel Island in an attempt to prove Stefansson's theory that life could be sustained by the resources of the country; but whether their knowledge was insufficient or whether the theory itself is impractical, they became ill with scurvy; and in attempting to reach the Siberian mainland across the ice, they all lost their lives. . . .

We took the men in the skin boat back to the ship, and with considerable difficulty got it about and started out. The ice was moving before a southwest wind, and was in danger of closing in and blocking us in our attempt to return to open water, crushing the *King and Winge* as it had in the past many whaling-ships in that vicinity, and so we lost no time. Again we fought our way through the eighty miles we had already covered with such difficulty, and just as we came out of the ice into open water, we found the revenue cutter *Bear* with Captain Bartlett aboard steaming back and forth, looking for an opening. They came down at us, and Bartlett came aboard, looked the men over and said: "Well, well, we'll take them aboard the revenue cutter." The men wanted to stay with us on the *King and Winge*, but Bartlett was their boss and they went with him, to be taken to Nome and sent back home; and we on the *King and Winge* went on about our business.

How I Found Adventure

By BEATRICE GRIMSHAW

(Continued from page 4)

Certainly the practice was fairly common, however it was brought about, and it seemed to please everybody.

I was given, by a chief, a charm as a safe-pass for a day and a night among the wildest tribes. It was carved from a beautiful orange shell, and represented the circle of the sun caught in the curve of the crescent moon. I don't know how much or how little it had to do with the fact that I never got into any trouble, although I was told by the men of one tribe (Malaita, of course) that they might kill me or any white any day, just for fun, if they happened to feel like it.

I WENT to New Caledonia, famous, infamous French penal island, slept in one of a row of former convict cells, and saw the church where the celebrated mass marriages took place, a couple of hundred male convicts being married all at once to as many female convicts specially imported.

I was received by the natives of Dutch New Guinea with a curious ceremony, staged as well as Hollywood could have done it—knives and spears threateningly held up by some of the young men, while older men raised high above them a burning brand and a branch of palms, signifying homes and hearths and peace. They did not allow women to see the interior of their men's temples; but I had bought my way in—with a gift of bread and butter!—and the ceremony that was afterward staged outside the men's sacred house was meant to be interpreted as follows; "You have deserved death for entering the sacred house. But you have been forgiven. You may enter our homes, and it is peace between us."

I was friends with the old Queen of the Cook Islands, the late Makea Takau, a real monarch, six feet three in height, who ruled her islands with an iron scepter. Her Prince Consort, Ngamaru, was less civilized than she; it was his way to threaten people who offended him, by making the "cannibal sign" at them—rapidly drawing his clenched fist across his teeth; the signification being: "I will tear you with my teeth!" As for Makea Takau, she used most cour-

teously to tell an enemy, "I do not expect to see you after Wednesday;" and the enemy walked away, and obediently died on the Wednesday, of nothing at all.

The beautiful Princess Tuera (of whom I afterward wrote many stories entitled "Queen Vaiti") was a friend of mine in old days. She was Raratongan, extremely lovely, and fiery as a female dragon. She had captained her father's recruiting schooner, often, and ran it like a bucko mate of whaling days. I never knew her to be beaten by anything or anybody, male or female, alive or dead. Thirty years later, I found that she had defeated even Time, and was beautiful still. She lives in Raratonga, today.

In those days I roamed the South Seas in a schooner long since sunk among the corals—the *Countess of Ranfurly*, captained by a little white daredevil who afterward became famous in another quarter of the world as an Antarctic explorer. Any passenger he took had to work passage as well as pay; I learned to go aloft, to "hand, reef and steer," and to use the sixteen-foot steering oar in the whaleboat. We found a pearl lagoon on one occasion, and when we reached the nearest island port, anarchy almost broke out among its few white inhabitants; they all wanted to secure the chart that marked off the lagoon, and I had to convey it across the island in the dead of night, to place it in safe hands.

WHEN I found New Guinea,—rather, the New Guineas, there being three divisions,—I knew that I had found my home. Adventure, after that, became a matter of course.

I was the first white woman to ascend the Fly and the Sepik, those wonderful and mysterious rivers, still little known; and only two or three white men had been before me. On the Sepik, I had my narrowest escape when a body of head-hunters urged me to come and see their village, all by myself, because their women wanted to look at me. I ventured to leave the men of my party—two only, but well-armed—as I wanted greatly to see something that no one else had seen. It came rather nearer than was pleasant

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to my seeing nothing any more; because the headhunters, when they had brought out two or three old and terrified women as a bait, began to bar me into a house, while the women, hurriedly, disappeared—an unmistakable sign of trouble.

I got away by backing down the track and making signals to invisible (and non-existent) friends. Headhunters are nervy folk, jumpy and undecided until the moment when they strike. Before they had made up their minds, I was round the corner; going slowly, afterwards I ran. They had never seen a long-haired head before, and there was little doubt they intended to secure that choice specimen for their head house.

Adventures and adventures! The time when a little Government exploring party of less than a dozen, myself included, faced a dancing howling army of seven hundred savages, who had only twice met with white men; once when they killed a famous missionary, and once when a punitive expedition came to shoot up their town. They had of course been saving their revenge. They might have wiped us out, but our leader walked right in among them, talked to them and gave them tobacco, and offered to show them a white woman—if they would be good. It was like offering a circus ticket to a country boy. They quieted down at once and produced an old woman or two, (as "collateral"). I was assisted to land; the whole army came to stare, and spent a happy afternoon following me about and yelling in astonishment at the amazing sight. And there was peace. . . .

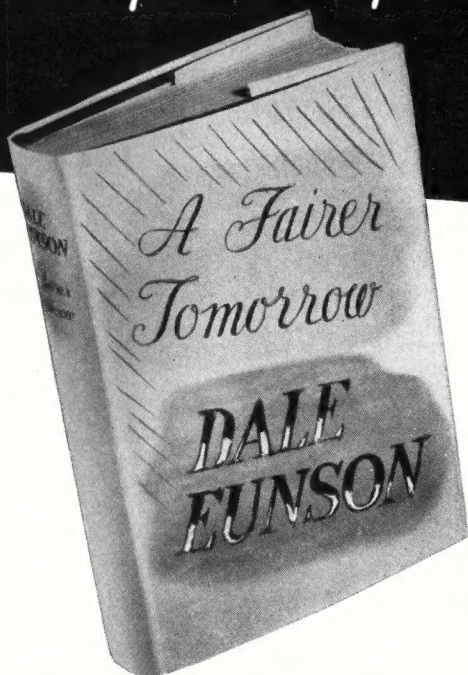
I built a house on a coral island, a beautiful house made of sago palm, and decorated with pearl shell; I lived there for several years, and loved it. I had a house built on three huge war-canoes, moored in the sea; I loved that house until it became a meeting-ground for crocodiles who lived in the surrounding shallows and bellowed like bulls at night. I had another house, big and cool, overhanging the harbor; I loved it too, until twenty-seven years of malaria began to take heavy toll, and I had to move to New South Wales, Australia, where I bought a delightful cottage a hundred and ten years old, and am living in it still.

Romance? Yes, such as I have never written, and never will write. Sorrow, and death; a spot in an island graveyard where "the mossy marbles rest" upon the bravest heart that Papua ever knew.

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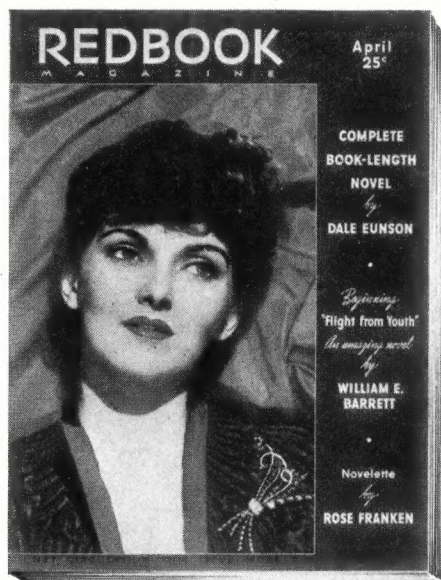
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